

WORDS FROM BIGTOP

Weekly Devotional

August 3, 2026

Longing for Home

A devotional on Psalm 84:1–3

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of Heaven’s Armies. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young at a place near your altar, O LORD of Heaven’s Armies, my King and my God!” — Psalm 84:1–3, NLT

There is something universal in this psalm — the ache of homesickness, but pointed toward God rather than a place. The psalmist describes God’s dwelling as lovely, almost unbearably so, and confesses that his whole being — soul, heart, and flesh — cries out for it. This is not polite religious language. It is the language of someone away from home too long.

Longing for home is different from missing a place. You can miss a house and simply feel nostalgic. But this kind of longing is the feeling that something in you doesn’t quite fit anywhere else — that you are managing, coping, functioning out in the world, but not fully resting. The ache itself is not a sign of weak faith. It is often a sign of a faith that remembers what it is missing.

Even the sparrow has found a home. The psalmist notices something almost embarrassing — the birds nesting near the altar have found a place closer to God’s presence than he currently has. If a sparrow can find its place near God, how much more should we be able to find rest there?

When Church Was Not an Hour, But a Life

The older we get, the more some of us long for a simpler season — when church was the center of everything, not an hour carved out of the week. Sunday morning and Sunday night. Monday night prayer. Tuesday board meetings. Wednesday Royal Rangers and Missionettes. Thursday worship practice. Saturday bake sales, car washes, and meals carried to families in need. Church was where life and meaning were found — a rhythm woven through every day of the week, not a single appointment on the calendar.

That kind of rhythm was on full display in a season spent as a youth pastor at a small Full Gospel church in Washington, North Carolina — playing congas and auxiliary percussion for only a semester, but long enough to witness real community.

Worship practice began around 8:00 a.m., long before service — a thirty-voice choir and nine musicians seeking God’s heart before anyone else arrived. By 11:00, members entered a room where the table was already set, and they simply fell into what had already begun. The pastor, deep in prayer just off the stage, would come out and test the temperature of the room — sometimes moving straight into the sermon, sometimes calling the room deeper into worship and returning to his office to wait on God while the Spirit built.

Around 12:30, a group of elders would slip away to the fellowship hall, and soon the aroma of fried chicken and baked goods would drift into the sanctuary. When the pastor caught the scent, something would shift in him, and he would call the whole church to the feast prepared in the next room. Afterward, the youth played basketball and threw footballs in the yard. The older men gathered for dominoes and stories of days gone by. The women quilted, taught the little ones to sew and cross-stitch, or tended the community garden the church had built to feed the less fortunate. By 5:00 p.m., the musicians returned to the sanctuary, and before long the whole church was back in prayer, crying out in gratitude for provision and purpose. In the evening, the pastor or an elder would take the pulpit for testimonies, rejoicing again in the goodness of God.

Church was not an hour out of life. It was life.

Ruth

That sense of home reaches back even further — to childhood, when my parents were just beginning to find God’s walk for their own lives. They ran a restaurant and worked most nights, so much of that early upbringing came through an amazing Black nanny named Ruth, who taught the joy of life from a very young age. She walked the children down the block in Chicago to a church meeting nearly every day.

Yes, there was time to play with other kids — but what really happened in those rooms was watching the example of godly men and women in prayer meetings, worship services, and testimony gatherings. Decades later, Ruth’s face is still what comes to mind when the Lord is speaking in prayer.

She was not doing ministry when she walked those children down that block. She was simply letting them watch her live — and something took root that is still speaking all these years later.

Doing It Our Way

Today's world continually teaches us to run from the things of old, to have it our way — but is that not what started all of this in the first place, when Adam and Eve chose to do it their way? Scripture calls us to bring every thought under the Lord's provision. How are we thinking of God in the places we go? We are told we are the temple of the Lord — so how are we carrying Him to the places outside the church walls?

“The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.” — Genesis 3:6, NLT

“We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.” — 2 Corinthians 10:5, NLT

“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

Even within the church, we have built impressive theaters — comfortable seating, polished music, careful lighting — all designed to hold attention for forty-five minutes to an hour. Someone may smile and shake your hand at the door. But who is pulling you aside, inviting you to lunch to actually sit with your heart and your hurt? Where is the healing that is supposed to move through the hands and feet of God's people — through us?

Our front doors are smaller than our back doors, and people are leaving confused and still in need of healing. They may have heard a great, anointed message. The Holy Spirit may have genuinely overwhelmed a soul in that room. But without leadership, structure, and guidance to follow, for most it enters one ear and falls out the other.

Seed, Soil, and New Wineskins

This is the parable of the sower again — seed scattered on the road, in the byways, and in rich, fertile soil. The question worth sitting with is not only what kind of soil we are, but what happens to the seed after it lands. Thorns do not choke a seed instantly. Rocky ground does not wither a plant on day one. It is attrition without root — and discipleship structures are the root system. Without them, even good soil eventually loses what fell on it, because nothing held the moisture in.

“A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” — Matthew 13:3–8, NLT

Consider what happens when the Lord pours out His water on dry land that has not been cultivated — those of us in Texas know exactly what that looks like. It does not soak in. It runs off, and that runoff becomes a destructive surge that wrecks homes and tears apart lives. If we want the outpouring of God to sustain the people around us rather than flood past them, we need new wineskins — not new music or lighting, but real capacity: rhythm, relationship, and structure able to hold what is poured out without bursting or leaking it back onto the ground.

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved.” — Matthew 9:17, NLT

The old wineskin of Washington, North Carolina was not old because it lacked comfortable chairs. It held capacity because it had rhythm — daily and weekly re-entry into God’s presence — so that whatever the Spirit did on Sunday had six more days of soil to land in before it evaporated.

Laying Our Young at the Altar

Psalms 84:3 calls us to find a place at the altar to lay our young, so they may be covered by the blessing of the LORD of Hosts — the King of Kings, the one true God. It is our job to sow our children, our future, into the Word of the Lord and the church of the Lord, so that when they stray, they may carry a yearning for Home.

“Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.” — Proverbs 22:6, NLT

The psalmist’s ache is almost envy — even a sparrow gets to nest that close to God’s presence. The call is to turn that image into action for parents and churches: do not leave that nesting to chance. Build it on purpose.

Ruth did not explain theology — she built the nest by walking a child daily into the presence of godly people. That childhood church did not teach devotion in a classroom — it surrounded a

life with it seven days a week until it became the shape of that life before there were words for it. That is what sowing children in the Word of the Lord actually looks like in practice — not one lesson, but an environment they are nested in long enough that it gets into their bones.

A seed sown into shallow attention leaves nothing behind to miss when a person strays. But a child raised in the actual nest, close to the altar, who later wanders — like the prodigal — carries a homesickness precisely because home was real. That is the mechanism behind every memory in this reflection: decades removed from a small church and a woman named Ruth, and the ache has not faded — because it was never sentiment. It was formation. The nest was real, so the memory of it still pulls.

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father...’” — Luke 15:17–18, NLT

Psalm 84 is not only a psalm for the one longing for home. It is a mandate for the ones building the nest in the first place — so that longing has somewhere to point.

A reflection born out of a prayer meeting, on Psalm 84:1–3. Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT), copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission.