

## JUST LET ME GO HOME A Devotional Meditation from

Psalm 1:1-6; Jeremiah 17: 5-10; Luke 13:6-9; Galatians 5:16-23; James 3:13-18

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For as long as I can remember, *The Beach Boys'* hit "Sloop *John B*" has made me think of a training cruise. The *John B* was a small ship that worked the waters of The Bahamas. It was wrecked about the year 1900.\* The ballad about the ship originated shortly afterward, and in 1966 that Al Jardine and Brian Wilson transformed the ballad into a *Beach Boys* classic.†

This is definitely not a song about a pleasure cruise! The singer explains the miseries of life aboard a small ship, enduring disagreeable shipmates, troubles with officers of the law, loneliness, violence, theft, drunkenness, and estrangement from his grandfather, the authority figure on the voyage. This litany of woes explains the persistent refrain, "Let me go home; I feel so broke up, I wanna go home."

That refrain may be why my mind connects this song with a training cruise designed to teach young sailors the ways of the sea. That is the purpose of the US Coast Guard ship *Eagle*, one of only two sailing ships in the US military. Every summer, the *Eagle* embarks on a six-week journey with a crew of cadets from the Coast Guard Academy. As these cadets learn, the voyage of the *Eagle* is not only about teaching them navigation, but transforming them from self-seeking, immature individuals into a seasoned crew who look after not only the ship, but each other.‡



A U.S. Coast Guard Cadet glances down while climbing a mast of the CGC *Eagle* during the ship's 2019 summer cruise. (USCG photo posted August 13, 2019, US Coast Guard Barque *EAGLE* Official Facebook page.)

I have never been on such a training cruise, but I experienced similar transformative processes in my early years with the US Army. The training I endured was never intended to be easy. If it had been, my colleagues and I would never have become skilled leaders capable of initiative and independent thought who could carry others forward to accomplish our mission. Often the training was more difficult than the situations we encountered in a combat zone. And I will confess that more than once I uttered my own rendition of that refrain from the *John B*: "Let me go home."

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\* "Sloop John B Lyrics," *Genius Lyrics*, accessed April 2, 2021 (<https://genius.com/1734013>).

† Jason Scott, "Behind The Song: Beach Boys, 'Sloop John B,'" *American Songwriter*, 2020 (<https://americansongwriter.com/beach-boys-sloop-john-b-behind-the-song/>).

‡ "America's Tall Ship," United States Coast Guard Academy, accessed April 2, 2021 (<https://www.uscga.edu/eagle/>).

This is a refrain all of us have uttered at various points in our lives. Life is hard, and its trials all too often leave us distressed beyond our ability to cope.

Yet we must cope, somehow. Or so others tell us – the others who observe from safe places beyond our circumstances. They mean well, but their encouragement, advice, exhortation, and straight talk never relieve our suffering, and sometimes rob us of whatever desperate hope we may still have.

“Let me go home.” It’s what a widow says to her Creator as she contemplates the prospect of living another 20 years without the love of her life.

“I wanna go home.” It’s what a desperate parent cries at night when his special needs son has finally gone to sleep, free for a few hours from a struggle that few comprehend.

“Why don’t they let me go home?” It’s the question of a man who thinks he has failed at everything, even at finding a wife. Or of a woman who can never have children. These are the basic functions of human beings, yet they seem to be incapable of fulfilling them. How is that fair?

If the answer were easy, then life would not be as full and meaningful as it has proven. We are living through a training course our Creator designed to run for many thousands of years. The fruit of this training is rarely apparent before our part in the program is complete. In fact, the fruit is not intended for us, but for someone else. That’s the way of nature: a tree never consumes its own fruit, but produces that others may consume it.

Thus the widow may never hear the testimony of the grandchild who credits her prayers for ensuring he never strayed far from the path of righteousness.

The parents of the boy with autism seldom see the joy he brings to others with his simple, straightforward approach to life, and the love in action as they provide for him even into their elder years.

The barren woman hardly knows the multitude of lives she has changed by channeling her nurturing nature into the many who found their way into her home, her classroom, her church, her shop.

And the man who thought he failed at everything? He rarely recognizes the way others admire him for the loving care he shows to his aging parents and his disabled brother. Nor does he realize the profound changes for good he makes in others simply by listening to them and offering candid advice.

These are the fruits of lives well lived. Hard lives, yes, but good lives. The psalmist speaks of such lives:

Happy is the one who has not walked in the advice of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the *Torah* [the Law, Teaching, and Commandments] of *ADONAI*, and on His *Torah* he meditates day and night.

He will be like a planted tree over streams of water, producing its fruit during its season. Its leaf never droops—but in all he does, he succeeds.

The wicked are not so. For they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand during the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For *ADONAI* knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.  
(Psalm 1:1-6 TLV)

The righteous are like a tree. Jeremiah also writes of this:

Blessed is the one who trusts in *ADONAI*, whose confidence is in *ADONAI*. For he will be like a tree planted by the waters, spreading out its roots by a stream. It has no fear when heat comes, but its leaves will be green. It does not worry in a year of drought, nor depart from yielding fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8 TLV)

And what is this fruit of righteousness? James says it is sown in peace by those who make peace. Paul says it is peace, and more:

But the fruit of the *Ruach* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Messiah have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:22-23 TLV)

Here is the hard thing: how we get to the point of bearing this desirable fruit. That's what Paul means by crucifying the flesh. It's what the righteous do, even though they don't know they're doing it. They simply proceed because they have learned it's the right thing, even though it hurts sometimes.

How do we begin crucifying the flesh? Honestly, it's something we can't do unless our Creator intervenes. Yeshua tells us about this in a parable:

"A man had a fig tree he had planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'Indeed, for three years I've come searching for fruit on this fig tree and found none. Remove it! Why does it use up the ground?'

"But answering, the gardener said to him, 'Master, leave it alone for this year also, until I dig around it and apply fertilizer. And if it bears fruit, good. But if not, cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9 TLV)

Do you wonder what this spiritual fertilizer is that the Gardener uses? It's clear enough when we read this passage in the King James:

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. (Luke 13:8-9 KJV)

Do you hear that? The Gardener must dig out all the things that keep the tree from maturing, and then put dung all over it so it has an environment that promotes growth. In human terms, the dung means the very hard things we have to endure in our daily lives.

Seems like a strange way our redeeming God has established to mature us into our eternal Kingdom purposes. But that's really what we want, even if we don't know it. I like to think that our Father interprets every desperate cry to go home, and others like them, as prayers to complete His work in us so we are able to take our places in His heavenly Kingdom. If that really is His purpose, as the Bible tells us, then maybe the simple hope of Him achieving it can be enough to help us persevere for one day more.