

A HOUSE FOR THE LONELY A Devotional Meditation from

Numbers 1:1-4:20; Hosea 1:10-2:21; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 68:5-6;
Matthew 23:13; Romans 9:24-26

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Heartbreaking is a good word to describe the condition of children who enter the foster care system. One wonders how people could cause or allow such unspeakable trauma to come upon an innocent child. Such children have a distorted concept of family. For them, a normal family is not the healthy, nurturing entity it should be. Our society seems to have lost a healthy concept of *normal*, and therefore our children have no positive frame of reference for their lives. To me, that is the greatest tragedy of all.



Master Sgt. Ernie Valley cradles his newly adopted daughter, Oleksandra, at the Boise, Idaho, airport, January 23, 2014. U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Samuel Morse, [via Flickr](#).

Perhaps my Christian upbringing in Alabama was an anomaly even for mid-twentieth century America. It seems that way now. As my siblings and I observed terrible things happening to families all around us, we wondered what was different about us that our family could be so loving and stable. Even our friends at church encountered things one would expect to be common only in the “unchurched” – things like divorce, drug abuse, alcohol addiction, marital infidelity, pregnancy out of wedlock, and dishonest business dealings. Such things were considered abnormal for godly people, and far from the standards of right conduct God intended. Those standards were honored more often in the breach than in actual practice, but at least they were honored. That’s how our society shaped its idea of what a family is, and how it is supposed to hold together.

The society I live in today doesn’t have such an idea of God’s standards. We have replaced that idea with a fluid definition of normal that seems to involve doing whatever is right in one’s eyes regardless of consequences. Daily existence becomes the focus – an endless cycle of acquiring enough to eat by any means. If pleasure can be obtained along the way, as well as a measure of power over others, then let it be done so the cycle can be completed more easily the next day.

This is not what our Creator intended. What I read in His word, and what I’ve experienced in my life, tells me He is serious about this promise:

A father of orphans, defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.
God settles the lonely in a home.
He leads prisoners out to prosperity.
But the rebellious live in a parched land.

Psalm 68:6-7 (5-6) TLV

He settles the lonely in a home. Do we know what that means in this fragmented age? If “home” means simply a place to lay our heads at night with people who may or may not have our best interests at heart even though they share our blood and DNA, then we really do not know what our God intends. Such “homes” do little for the lonely, except create a space where other people partake of the same misery of existence.

For all our technological sophistication, it seems we have gained nothing over peoples whose traditional values and social structures remain somewhat intact. We used to call tribal societies “primitive,” but the more I learn about them, the more advantages I see in their cultivated sense of belonging. For them, “home” is more like the Hebrew word the psalmist used: *beit*, which means *house*.

God settles the lonely, the solitary, the outcast, the dispossessed, the forgotten, the broken, the worthless, the expendable in the *house* He established. That would be the House of Israel: the redemptive sanctuary our Redeemer created to bring refugees from the nations into His enduring Kingdom. That’s why He made His New Covenant with the House of Israel, and sealed it with the blood of His Messiah.

Of course, our Adversary would rather we remain isolated, fragmented, and lonely so we never learn our true worth and resist his deadly schemes. He has pursued that objective throughout history through his disciples like Egypt’s Pharaoh. Perhaps the real reason Pharaoh felt threatened by the Hebrew family of Jacob was not because they outnumbered the Egyptians, but because their close-knit social structure made them virtually invincible. Moreover, the Hebrew family welcomed outsiders, providing a place for those who had nowhere else to go. The large family Jacob brought to Egypt already included Canaanites, Arameans, Egyptians, and people of other nations. Assuming that trend continued over the next two centuries, how long might it have been before the Hebrews actually did supplant the Egyptians in their own land simply by being more inclusive to all who wanted to become part of the tribes? Of course, Pharaoh’s greatest fear never came to pass, at least while the Hebrews were in Egypt. It took a year of isolation at Sinai before the mixed multitude became the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

We assume that everyone who walked out of Egypt with Moses was an Israelite. They may have ended up as Israelites, but it was in fact a mixed multitude who joined in the Exodus with the Hebrews. Those people had no tribal identity, and no attachment to Jacob’s family. They all surely wondered what the world was coming to and how to survive when the Plagues began. The wise soon caught on. Even if they had no attachment to the Hebrews before, they saw the Hebrews’ God prove Himself powerful to judge and to save, and they voted with their feet to align with Him. He responded by bringing them all into the House and settling them among the tribes.

Does this ancient biblical story have any application to Christians in the 21st century? Maybe more than we know. We have been organizing ourselves into tribes for centuries. We call them by different names, such as Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Coptic, Methodist, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Presbyterian. There is no hereditary component to any of these tribes, although families tend to stay with their denominational tribe for generations. One might say these mixed multitudes have somehow come together as a people even though they were not a people before this.

Which is precisely why Paul cited Hosea's prophecy of Israel's restoration to explain the phenomenon of Gentiles coming to faith in Yeshua, the Hebrew Messiah:

Even us He called—not only from the Jewish people, but also from the Gentiles—as He says also in Hosea,

“I will call those who were not My people, My people,’
and her who was not loved, Beloved.’

And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them,
‘You are not My people,’
there they shall be called sons of the living God.”

Romans 9:24-26 TLV

This is the House of Israel. It consists of both the native born and the foreigner. Until now, we have sought to define and remake this Hebrew House according to our own preferences so that the only tribes in it are our own and the few others we tolerate. Thus have earned the same rebuke our Messiah spoke to the authorities of His day:

But woe to you, *Torah* scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not enter yourselves, nor do you let those enter who are trying to go in.

Matthew 23:13 TLV

We still are not a people because we don't understand what God's family is and how it works. We are, at best, a mixed multitude who share a loose intellectual attachment to the idea of a Redeeming God. If we truly want to progress to the next step in Kingdom restoration, we would be wise to regain an understanding of what our Heavenly Father intended when He created families.