

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

THE BEGINNING OF HEAVEN

You are admitted to enjoy the blessing because the righteousness which was His is now transferred to you that you may be blessed of the Lord world without end. Do let us triumph and rejoice in this evermore. Why should we not? And yet some of God's people get under the law as to their feelings, and begin to fear that because they are conscious of sin they are not saved, whereas it is written, "he justifieth the ungodly." For myself, I love to live near a sinner's Saviour. If my standing before the Lord depended upon what I am in myself and what good works and righteousness I could bring, surely I should have to condemn myself a thousand times a day. But to get away from that and to say, "I have believed in Jesus Christ and therefore righteousness is mine," this is peace, rest, joy, and the beginning of heaven!

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

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THE FOOTPATH OF OUR TREK

IT IS REALLY UP TO US, YOU SEE. Not the *collective* “we,” not the fettered mass of humanity all lumped together atop this orb we call home, but each one of us as free individuals. We are free to choose our path, free to choose our friends, and unmistakably free to choose the perspective from which we will view and experience this life. It is really up to each one of us what we will gain, how much we will mature and grow from the remainder of our time on this earth.

Some people think that this world, as it is right now, is as good as it gets. Bound to the soil, they see bad events and bad people as only transient hiccups along the inevitable destination—a point somewhere in the future at which “essentially good” man will have evolved into his intended Utopian state, a point when man will have finally realized the condition he has deserved all along. These individuals cling to the strata and structure of this world like a drowning man clings to the slippery boulder that affords only tenu-

ous salvation from being rushed downstream toward the cataract, falls, and eventual death. This world is their preferred home, and they have invested all that they have and are in the hope of its redemption.

Some people, on the other hand, can’t see very much good in this world at all, and, as they wait longingly for the next, stiffen their resolve and live one miserable day after another, toughing it out like the good and righteous scouts that they are. Every connection they have with the here and now is held lightly, vaporously, as something that just may—please, God!—be vaporized tomorrow. By choice they have few friends outside of their local congregation for, you see, those reprobates all belong to “the world”—sinners all, damned to eternal hellfire, every one of them—and just don’t quite measure up to the blessed standards of those awaiting Their Returning Lord (please, God, let it be today!).

Jesus, too, chose His path—and He

chose neither of the two extremes described above. Say what you will about Him, Jesus was no fool. As the agent-creator of this world, He believed no false propaganda about it or its inhabitants. He knew that it was not perfect, but was redeemable; He knew that this world was not heaven—but that heaven would one day be populated by many of its souls. And He knew that the Father had placed here, in profuse abundance, sufficient resources for anyone to experience—even while still earth-bound—the beginning of heaven.



There is no denying that for the believer there is an awkward and inelastic tension between the physical and the eternal world. Far worse it would be if there were none, however, for the believer is not *meant* to be at home here. It is not his home.

All these died in faith, without receiving

the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Hebrews 11:13

Something happens within the believer at the point of conversion. Because it is associated more with progressive sanctification than justification, which is immediate, it very often seeps into the consciousness over time—a gradual realization that she is dwelling in a foreign land, homesick for a place she has never seen. The conversation of her old friends begins to sound tinny, and strange; activities to which she was once drawn begin to interest her less; practices and concepts that were once utterly foreign, even comical in their strangeness, begin to seem comfortable—and the start of new habits.

Though some may try, this metamorphosis is not from conscious effort. In fact, it doesn't work very well to mechanically speed the process along. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of flesh, and is best left up to Him.

So from now on we regard no one from

a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:16-18a NIV

Yet the believer is not left in limbo. On the surface it may seem unkind of God to leave us down here, stuck between two worlds—an alien in one, without residence in the other. But in fact the terra firma (upon which we so often feel *persona non grata*) is less a gulag than a launch pad. Rather than wasting the hours in each day regretting the place of his residence, the believer should consider his earth-home, instead (to borrow the phrase coined by John Barton for the famous Forest Lawn Cemetery in Southern California), the “first step up toward heaven.”



Many serious scientists remain in creative pursuit of the colonization of the earth's moon. They have devised fantastic means by which man might live there—not out of an unnatural desire to

dwell in the gray dust that comprises its surface, but because the moon would supply a launch platform from which our kind could more efficiently explore the outer reaches of space. With its more modest gravitational pull, it would be far less expensive to initiate flights of discovery from the moon than it has always been from earth.

The Christian should not be in love with earth for its own sake, but should look upon it as—by the creative ministry of the Spirit—a new opportunity to begin the migration up to heaven. This world is not a dismal substitution for heaven, nor is it a barrier to it. This world is merely the physical path we take to get there. Mind you, earth is not the means by which we *attain* heaven. Far from it. There is only one way to reach heaven—and this world is not it.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

John 14:6

But this earth is the *footpath* of our trek. As much as is salvation through Christ, our journey on this globe is part of the

Father's design—part of the process of sanctification. As such, it contains parts of Him. Look around: God and His handiwork are everywhere. More than that, however, this world can be a convenient place of transition; finding reflections of heaven (dim though they may be) here

on earth, and consciously beginning the transformation from earth-soiled believer to resurrected saint (not, as some believe, an angel), we are able to enjoy some of the actual benefits of that glorified state while still caught in the clutches of this world's leaden gravity.

*The thought of God, the thought of Thee,
Who liest in my heart,
And yet beyond imagined space
Outstretched and present art—*

*The thought of Thee, above, below,
Around me and within,
Is more to me than health and wealth,
Or love of kith and kin.*

*Within a thought so great, our souls
Little and modest grow,
And, by its vastness awed, we learn
The art of walking slow.*

*The wild flower on the mossy ground
Scarce bends its pliant form,
When overhead the autumnal wood
Is thundering like a storm.*

*So is it with our humbled souls
Down in the thought of God,
Scarce conscious in their sober peace
Of the wild storms abroad.*

*To think of Thee is almost prayer,
And is outspoken praise;
And pain can even passive thoughts
To actual worship raise.*

Frederick William Faber



THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

THE VENERABLE KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible uses the word “mansions” to describe the Christian’s dwelling in heaven:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

John 14:1-3 KJV

But the Greek word (*mone*) can refer to just about any kind of an abode—from a shack, or a hut in a field, to an apartment or house. There is no guarantee that the believer in heaven will be living in a one hundred-room manor house. On the other hand, a “hut” by heavenly standards just may be the equivalent of an earthly mansion! I have a feeling that none of it will matter anyway. There is nothing at all

to indicate that in our heavenly state we will be the least bit interested in the socioeconomic level of our neighborhood. We will have other more pressing matters with which to occupy our time.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:11-14

INCONSEQUENTIALS

When I was a child, the minutia of life was an endless fascination. In detail I knew the texture of the bark of the hackberry tree that bore my tree house. The nooks and crannies of our garage’s attic were a catacomb of discovery and imagination, in which I fashioned forts and caves, and secret dwellings. I knew the aroma of the first day of spring, and the excruciating cold of delivering newspapers on a winter’s eve. I was familiar with every bend, every tide pool and miniature cataract of the tiny creek that meandered behind Franklin Elementary School.

As I grew older, the objects of my fascination changed. I discovered cars, and sports—and girls. But I still had the time and luxury to know them all in lingering detail: It was important that I knew the various models and types of cars. I read books about baseball, played in Little League, and knew the rich, leathery smell of my glove’s palm, and the comfortable feel of swinging my own bat.

And, of course, by a certain age the fairer sex became a powerful distraction from just about everything else. Suddenly my clothing, the cut of my hair, the scented liquid I applied after a shower, the popular songs playing on the radio—all became very important to me.

Even when I went off to serve in the navy, I became intimately acquainted with the mirror-like shine on my shoes, the perfect crease in my trousers, the brevity of my haircut. During my stint as a mess cook, I memorized the smell of a walk-in reefer filled with vegetables, and the wilting steam coming off a serving table. Overseas I knew the cloying aromas of a Hong Kong marketplace, the smell of gray paint on a steel deck, and the sweet feeling of freedom when on liberty after a month at sea.

Life, during my youth, consisted of all these small things—absorbed and memorized, pigeon-holed, categorized—that became the catalog of everything important. Small things were important because youth experience life by minutes and hours. Time passes slowly for the young.

when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

1 Corinthians 13:11

Time for adults, on the other hand, passes at breakneck speed. During some hazy, unrecorded point in my adult life, small things became less important—almost invisible. Youth experience their life through a microscope, down to every tiny detail, while adults experience life through a wide-angle lens. The teenage girl knows the eating and grooming habits of the very latest pop heartthrob, but the adult woman already has her attention filled to capacity with the raising of her children, management of house and husband, or the daily rigors of the workplace.

I no longer have the luxury of studying the bark on each tree; I must do my work, then move on. The vehicle I drive is no longer selected for its appeal to others, but for its low price, and its reliability in moving me from Point A to Point B. I no longer listen to the popular music of the day; I listen to the news and the weather.

ETERNALS

Time and its activities change between childhood and adulthood because of the necessary maturing of responsibilities. Most adults have had the opportunity to sift out of their life that which is inconsequential; adults have prioritized out of their lives much of the non-essentials of childhood to make room for the essentials of surviving in a hard world. Much of the contrast, therefore, can be explained by the need for basic time-management. But that does not explain it all.

Once we are born, we immediately begin our journey to the eternity of our calling; we begin the journey to whatever lies on the other side of our ultimate earthly demise. The only difference between the youth and the adult, is that the adult knows this; the misguided youth considers himself immortal.

The unbeliever shrugs off eternity as either myth, or an inevitable fate outside his capacity to change. In either case it becomes something to disregard. The believer, too, has a choice in how he reacts to what (for him) will be a more pleasant end. Many a Christian thinks of heaven with the same disregard as unbelievers: *It is out there; it is inevitable; it is a good thing, but there is nothing I need*

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child;

to do about it. Therefore, I will not think about it.

Other Christians, however, have taken the next transitional step. Just as they left behind the minutia of childhood, in favor of the substantials of adulthood, they are now leaving behind the inconsequentials of this world, in favor of the eternals of the next. They have already taken that “first step up toward heaven.”

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

***Show me Thy face—one transient gleam
Of loveliness divine,
And I shall never think or dream
Of other love save Thine:
All lesser light will darken quite,
All lower glories wane,
The beautiful of earth will scarce
Seem beautiful again.***

***Show me Thy face—my faith and love
Shall henceforth fixed be,
And nothing here have power to move
My soul’s serenity.
My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
And all I feel and see,
Illusive, visionary—Thou
The one reality!***

***Show me Thy face—I shall forget
The weary days of yore,
The fretting ghosts of vain regret
Shall haunt my soul no more.
All doubts and fears for future years
In quiet trust subside,
And naught but blest content and calm
Within my breast abide.***

***Show me Thy face—the heaviest cross
Will then seem light to bear;
There will be gain in every loss,
And peace with every care.
With such light feet the years will fleet,
Life seem as brief as blest,
Till I have laid my burden down,
And entered into rest.***

Unknown



A WIDER VIEW

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at heaven and you will get earth “thrown in”; aim at earth and you will get neither.

C. S. Lewis

HOW DO WE LIVE AS THOUGH our today—in this earthly place and time—is actually the beginning of heaven?

The key is in the use of the wide-angled lens we have employed as adults. Heaven (by which I mean the God-driven philosophy and occupation of that perfect dwelling) focuses in like an electron microscope on only one thing: the Godhead itself. With only one thing are the inhabitants of heaven, like immortal youth with all the time in the world, free to invest themselves fully: the blissful adoration of God the Father, and the Lamb.

a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Revelation 7:9-12

Those who actually live in the continual presence of God do so with an intense, single-minded purpose. They study nothing as much as they study God; they love nothing as much as they love God. It is His dwelling place, the place of His throne, and not one of them wishes to be anywhere else. Everything else within their consciousness—and, as most of heaven is still a mystery to earth-dwellers, we cannot know what all that may be—is viewed by them through a wide-angled lens. Objects are rendered smaller, when viewed by this means. They are perceived as less significant, and become so in the viewer’s mind. Because they are less significant, these objects become less of a

After these things I looked, and behold,

distraction from the true object of the heaven-dweller's desire.

The earth-dweller, by contrast, has a few other things with which he must contend. For he is still of earth-bound flesh, not yet the glorified flesh which Jesus demonstrated during His final forty days on earth.

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.

Luke 24:36-43

Like his Lord, the resurrected saint will be able to walk through walls, yet eat

solid food. The saint still on earth, however, must make his entrance into a room through an opened door, and sometimes he gets indigestion.

Even so, it is not too early for the "un-glorified" saint to employ the same heavenly vision used by its inhabitants. It is possible for the mere human to view his life and surroundings through the clarifying wide-angled lens that diminishes all things—both good and bad—in comparison to the magnified image and presence of God.

A WAY OF LIFE

Worship is the means by which we refresh this perspective. In worship we slough off the built-up scales of earth-vision, rinse away the accumulated residue of our myopia, and see once again through clean, sharply focused eyes the truth of our position with respect to God's. In worship we set God on His throne, and thus remove ourselves from its lofty environs. That is the whole truth of it, but the message of this world—the message with which we are bombarded every waking moment—is that we belong on the throne—not God. Worship reorders that lie.

There is an authentic *event* of worship—regularly practiced, often corporate—during which we intentionally and specifically adore the Lord upon His throne. Sunday mornings have become institutionalized for this purpose, with protestant churches in the United States and around the world throwing open their doors to worshipping Christians. Most believers realize that there is nothing magical or ordained about the typical Sunday morning process; corporate worship can be just as authentic on Wednesday evenings, Monday mornings, or Saturday nights. But some have not learned that worship can also be for the individual a steady, continual way of life. Authentic worship, in whatever form, places God upon His rightful throne, and when worship is a way of life (rather than limited to an event), that worship becomes a way for the individual to continually magnify God before everything else—by discovering Him everywhere he looks. The seventeenth century monk, Brother Lawrence, described it this way:

This made me resolve to give the all for the All: so after having given myself wholly to God, to make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, I renounced, for the love of Him,

everything that was not He; and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world. Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge; at other times I beheld Him in my heart as my Father, as my God: I worshipped Him the oftenest that I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandered from Him. I found no small pain in this exercise, and yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that occurred, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily. I made this my business, as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer; for at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of God.

Such has been my common practice ever since I entered into religion; and though I have done it very imperfectly, yet I have found great advantages by it. These, I well know, are to be imputed to the mere mercy and goodness of God, because we can do nothing without Him; and I still less than any. But when we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him, at least willfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of God is rendered as it were natural to us. Give Him thanks, if you please, with me, for His great

goodness towards me, which I can never sufficiently admire, for the many favors He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am. May all things praise Him. Amen.

Scripture, invariably more succinct, puts it this way:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:33-36



AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region of Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself.

C. S. Lewis

ALL BELIEVERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN the capacity to know God, and the inclination to worship Him. We are people set apart, each individual given his or her own umbilical to heaven: the Holy Spirit. The Comforter—among His many other qualities and duties—shares with us the ability to do two things of critical importance to our relationship with the Father: to focus our attention on God, to the diminution of everything else; and to find God (or evidence of Him) in all elements of our earthly experience.

There is no shortage of evidence on this earth for the existence of and truth about God. Even the unregenerate know it is here.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress

the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.

Romans 1:18-22

So long as we remain on this world—so long as we remain “not-yet-glorified”—the unregenerate of this world will make every effort to cloud our vision. Their goal is to validate their own myopia by spreading its contagion to others, so that all will be as miserable as they. But by

the ministry and unbounded power of the Holy Spirit, the believer not only can *know* God while he remains on earth, but he can *revel* in Him—to the extent that this rather ungainly existence can be transformed into the beginning of heaven itself.

It is a great presumption of the Christian to claim that he knows with certainty what it will be like in heaven, for, in truth, we have scant information on that topic. Based on the character and behavior of its inhabitants, however, the Christian can certainly guess what it may be like.

The impression left by God’s word is that heaven is *all of Him*. His presence is everywhere; His “person” is the focus of everyone’s attention; His worship is the principal occupation of heaven’s citizens. If there are any other activities in that lofty realm, they are surely of minor

importance, and infrequent.

A TEMPLATE FOR LIVING

So here is our template for living while we remain rooted to the soil of earth. Since God, or His fingerprints, are everywhere, His reality and purpose are to be the focus of our attention. Meanwhile, His worship, in its many and varied forms, is to be our principal occupation.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."

Matthew 22:34-38 NIV

All other activities—admittedly of some importance to our temporal well-being—are to be incorporated into our pursuit of Him. This does not necessarily mean a change in our activities, but it certainly means a change in the outlook and intentions of our heart. And it means a change, developed by practice, in our

responses to everything around us.

Everyone in heaven knows that God is the source and arbiter of all things. Down here we must repeatedly remind ourselves of that truth. Through practice we train ourselves to have a response of gratitude and joy to beauty, to bounty, to pure love, to all those small occurrences that add texture and depth to our lives. God is the source; He is due the gratitude and praise. Like children we rediscover the small delights of living on earth, but like adults we learn to enjoy them as blessings from the hand of a gracious Father.

We train ourselves, until the practice becomes a reflexive habit, first to notice, then to enjoy, and finally to give thanks to God for all the good things of this life: family, security, beauty, home—even possessions, for they, too, are from Him. This is the easy part, and the habit is developed quickly.

More difficult is the habit of gratitude for the hard times, the times when our belly twists into a knot, and every part of our being wants to raise a fist in anger towards a God who would do such a thing. Everyone in heaven knows that God is the author of both the pleasant and the unpleasant. Those of us still on

earth, however, find ourselves choking on words of praise for flood and famine, for war and death. Our flesh is never so strong as when we muster a response to pain. It is hard for our small minds to accept that it, too, is from a loving God.

GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Here we, again, must employ the wide-angled lens—the perspective of heaven. Resentment and disbelief come easy when we linger with magnifying microscope upon every uncomfortable event—even those occurring to others, but especially those that come our way. But when we widen our perspective, placing the immediate event within not only a global scale, but within the context of history and God's word, it is easier to perceive the contemporary pain as only one small thread in the larger tapestry of humanity dwelling on earth. Widened even more, seen as if from the edge of heaven, our disaster—real as it is—becomes smaller still, and almost imperceptibly we begin to interpret all events, both pleasant and unpleasant, from a timeless, eternal perspective.

God's perspective.

And only then can this fragile and

muddy platform upon which we dwell
become for us the beginning of heaven.



A Song; a Psalm of the sons of Korah.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be
praised,
In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole
earth,
Is Mount Zion in the far north,
The city of the great King.
God, in her palaces,
Has made Himself known as a strong-
hold.

Psalm 48:1-3

Eternal life is far more than the believer's hope of heaven after death. That eternal life begins the moment the Holy Spirit draws us into a life in Christ. Eternal life with our heavenly Father after death is a promise—nothing we do or do not do will change that. Participating in that eternal life *now*, however, is an elective. It is a benefit held out to us, but many choose not to take it as their own.

We can think of it this way: Let's say someone gives you a gift of a month-long luxury cruise of the Mediterranean. It is worth many thousands of dollars. You and your spouse will be sailing on the largest, most luxurious cruise ship in the world. The amenities are without parallel. The food bountiful and sinfully delicious. On board are offered a boundless list of activities for every interest. The ports of call are myriad. All your expenses have been paid; all you need do is enjoy.

Then, upon boarding the ship, you spend the next four weeks shut in your cabin, eating from the trunk load of miserable sack lunches you brought with you.

That is how many in the family of God live out their days—a bare-bones, Spartan existence all the while surrounded by unimaginable luxury and wealth. Our eternal life in Christ—not just heaven, but the life we are living *right now*—has been bought and paid for by someone else. Anything we would ever want has been supplied for us. All we have to do is enjoy.

And then we sit in our windowless rooms, nibbling on our meager dry crackers and stale cheese.

EVENSONG

I DON'T REMEMBER listening to the birds while growing up. I suppose I did; living in a small town during the 1950s, in the fertile heartland of America, doubtless there were many times when the winged filled the air with song. But it is not a prominent memory.

The stuff of pleasure and delight changes over the years. As a child I took delight in things I could play with: a favorite stuffed animal, a metal toy truck, my tricycle. I found pleasure in my tree house, the many inventions dreamed up down in the basement of our house, and the stories of adventure and conquest read under the covers at night. These were the pleasures of my childhood, and I

remember them well. I still know what they felt like to touch; I can still taste the joy they brought to my life.

Adults experience life at a pace that does not encourage such small pleasures. Even those of us who live outside the accelerated pace of the big city—who live with the company of nature rather than the company of concrete, asphalt, and honking traffic—know living that flies by too fast for such innocent contemplation.

Which makes the evensong of the birds so precious. Springtime evenings—as the sun is setting behind the distant hills, leaving in its wake swirls of pinks and purples, and fading whites to paint the darkening sky—is the time (after the similar dawn) when the bird minions are at fullest voice. Stepping out into the evensong chorus is

the stuff of pleasure and delight for one encrusted with the insulation of years. The songs of the brown thrashers and cardinals, diminutive wrens and red-winged blackbirds reawaken joy, and revive a muted holiness lying dormant in the breast. For the beasts of the field remain one of our connections to God. Their song—no matter what they are really saying—to the ear of man is a sampling of pleasure and joy sent down by the Father of a higher kingdom. To pass along, beneath their lofty neighborhood, is to pass beneath the vicinity of God's throne, where angels and elders sing out His praise in unending song.