

Published based on [Christmas Longings](#)

Christmas Longings

I slept and awakened and slept and awakened and slept and awakened. The dream of my mother, lost and confused by Alzheimer's, played over and over in my sleep.

I awakened to a flood of emotions. Both love for my mother and an overwhelming sense of my lack of ability to help her washed over me.

Drawn to the place where I last left her, I made my way on the hour-long trip to the cemetery. Stopping to buy some Christmas flowers, I felt annoyed by the small talk I couldn't escape. I longed to be alone with my emotions.

Tears came as I drove. The turns and hills felt as familiar as the back of my hand. I'd driven that road a thousand times throughout my life and the journey itself told stories. The closer I got, the more the land felt a part of me.

Dreary weather gave way to sunshine peeking through the clouds as I arrived at the piece of ground that to me is much more than a cemetery beside a church. It is my epicenter. Exiting my car, I stood on the land. Acts 17:26 tumbled in my spirit, "God determined the boundaries of your dwelling." This land and I have history together.

Within a half mile of this piece of ground, much of my life story can be told. I lived here. Worked here. Played here. My family gathered here. These hills were home to endless days of my family working together, my brother and I riding trail bikes, planting gardens, mowing lawns, and working the farm. I reach down and touch the grass and pick up a handful of dirt. The smell of the dirt fills my nostrils and my mind with days gone by and I am there in the past and I am here all at the same time.

My eyes turn to the right and I see my aunt and uncle's old home. For a moment, I am there in that kitchen. Eating teacakes and saltines and colas and playing Rook and hearing the laughter around the table as the family gathered. I hear the noise of the talk and familiar voices fill my mind. I remember the longing to hear the adults talk, to eat at the table with them, and devour their family stories. As an adopted child, I remember how I longed to know family. I am loved in that place.

I look just beyond the church to the old home place where my grandparents once lived. Another family member lives there now and the old home place is gone, but the stories of life there are a part of me.

I gaze just up the road and around the curve and know that the home I grew up in is a breath away. My husband and I also made our dwelling in this community for several years.

Looking at the church, I feel it's as much a part of me as any place on the planet. It is the place I learned about God's love and spent summer's eating pinwheel cookies at VBS and making fruit baskets to take to the neighbors while we sang Christmas carols. The altar is where Eddie and I said our wedding vows. My dad, brother, and mother and many other family and friends were laid there as we eulogized their lives. The baptismal waters tell my family testimonies. I taught my first Bible lessons there and shared in the deep sense of community that existed and remains even today. And here I first felt the call of God on my life.

But it is this land, this cemetery, to which I've been drawn today. All around me, are the tombstones of the families of this community. I know their names and many of their stories. At my feet, lay the bodies of my mom, my dad, and my brother. Their spirits, their souls, have long since departed and remain alive in the presence of God but this place where I last left their physical bodies brings an instant rush of peace into my heart. I no longer feel like crying. I tell them I love them all and miss them and long for them. I long to hear my dad's joyous laugh. To sense my brother's calm strength. To feel my mother's relentless love.

I am the matriarch of this family now. Me. A child grafted in by adoption. The connect point to the generations beyond me. The mother, the aunt, the grandmother. It's a strange and lonely feeling.

I'm saddened to know that I won't be able to pass on all the sweet memories. And yet, I'm so filled with gratitude to have known such a sense of belonging, a sense of community and family. The words of Psalms 68:6 resonate in my soul, "God sets the solitary in families." I'll always know that God set my twin brother and me here, on this land, in this family. I have a quiet thankfulness and an overwhelming sense of awe in this moment for His wondrous redemptive purposes.

This quiet joy I feel is a gift to me this Christmas season. My prayer is that you find this joy, too, and experience all it means to live out His divine purposes for your life.

I can almost hear the old hymn we sung so often as I look beyond to the church:

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,

Leaning on the everlasting arms;

What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,

Leaning on the everlasting arms.



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