

# Homeward Bound

***Bishop Doug Stevens***

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*Bishop Doug Stevens*

### **Introduction**

Many images come to mind when people think of home. For most people it is associated with feeling and memories of happiness and safety – home is where mum and dad are or were; home is family. It's a place where the first interactions with other people happened, where the transition from childhood to adulthood occurred, where confidence and independence were gained. People can get very nostalgic about home. People sing about home, talk about it, yearn for it. So it is that the Franciscan writer Richard Rohr writes "The archetypal idea of home points in two directions at once. It points backward toward an original hint and taste for union, starting in the body of our mother. And it points forward, urging us toward the realisation that this hint and taste of union might actually be true" *Falling Upward* Jossey-Bass San Francisco 2011

Home is more than just one's house and family. Home is the town you grew up in, home is your country, the place where people speak your language, share your values and support the same team. All people must be away from home at times

for work, study or travel but look forward to the joy of return and welcome.

Sadly, for too many people home is or has been an experience of pain, rejection and regret. Far from leaving home positively they have escaped from a prison-like environment. Families are fragile and because of the negative affects of such things as unemployment, alcohol, relationship breakdown and gambling, home can fracture and become an alienating and dangerous place. Women and children are too often forced to leave home and seek refuge from violence. Too many young people choose to escape from criticism and abuse and find themselves struggling for existence on the streets. Street life is not an alternative home but a desperate fight for survival in the midst of poverty, violence and drugs.

Australia has for several decades shared the pain faced by many thousands of people around the world who have chosen to flee their homelands. Rather than stay and face persecution and danger because of civil war, political persuasion, race, religion or sexuality they have chosen to be homeless, losing the safety of not just a family but their community, their nation and language. Thus, people have come to us from Vietnam and Kampuchea, from Afganistan, Iran and Iraq, from Sudan and the Congo.

Now, importantly, the concept of home was very early extended to include a spiritual dimension and location. Home was linked to God, to church, to where one's heart finds

peace and purpose. At home with God, people can and have experienced the greatest sense of belonging and worthiness.

Just as people find themselves away from home through choice or necessity, most people at some stage in their lives realise that they are out of fellowship with God and thus away from their true home. Even if people can't always realistically go home to family, friends, community and country they always have the opportunity to return to their spiritual home.

This Lenten Study is based on the theme of **Homeward Bound**, and will draw upon the Gospel readings for Year C in the season of Lent, using An Australian Lectionary 2013.

During the five studies we will look in different ways at the theme of **Homeward Bound**:

- Lent 1 Deciding to head for home
- Lent 2 Israel's journey towards home
- Lent 3 Food and companionship for the journey home
- Lent 4 Changed and renewed as we head home together
- Lent 5 What should home be like?
- Lent 6 Home's front door is opened

Our Lenten journey begins with Ash Wednesday. On the annual Lenten beginning we focus upon the fact of our separation from God, from our original home, the place of innocence. **Homeward Bound** implies that we are away from our heart-place, the place of comfort. The Bible readings appointed for Lent are snap shots of our lost-ness and the journey home. The Biblical characters are many and famous;

our spiritual ancestors, the great heroes of Israel, Jesus and his followers, Paul and the members of the early church. All found themselves in a place they'd rather not be. All decided to do something about it, all orientated themselves towards home and started their journey.

As you journey through Lent together in 2013 you will read and discuss the stories of Israel's ponderous stumbling home to the promised land and God. You will share the journey of Jesus from Nazareth into the kingdom of God and to the cross. You shall come to appreciate the moment of decision and then the gift of the Church, the great fellowship of all those who are journeying home together.

In Holy Week you shall consider the joy of stepping through the door and walking into home. The destination is the resurrection life, life in the Spirit, in and with Jesus in the presence of the Father.



For the next five weeks, we agree to the following commitment as a group.

**ATTENDANCE:**

To give priority to group meetings.

**PARTICIPATION:**

To make every effort to participate fully within the group.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

To keep confidential everything that is shared.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:**

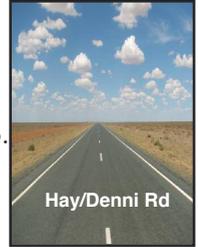
To accept the challenge to reach the goals we have set ourselves.

**ACCESSIBILITY:**

To give one another the right to call at any time for spiritual help in time of need - even in the middle of the night.

**EVANGELISM:**

To make an effort to each encourage one person to join this group.



**SPECIFICS**

We will meet on .....(Day of week)

We will meet at .....(Home/Place)

The meeting will begin at..... and close at .....

We agree to leave by ..... so as not to over stay our welcome.

**GROUND RULES**

Refreshments .....

Baby Sitting .....

Newcomers.....

Absence.....

**I WILL TRY WITH GOD'S HELP TO BE A REGULAR, FAITHFUL, CARING MEMBER OF THIS GROUP.**

**Names of Group Members**

**Phone**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
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.....

**Remember:** *While it is best to enjoy these studies from week one, you may like to encourage new people to join the group along the way. This may be a way of introducing them to home groups in the parish.*

# Deciding to Head Home - Study 1

Many of you will have will remember a wonderful movie from the 1960's – Paint Your Wagon. The least likely musical hit for many years came from the movie when Lee Marvin sang “I was Born Under a Wandering Star”.

Wheels are made for rolling, mules are made to pack  
I've never seen a sight that didn't look better looking back . . .  
Home is made for coming from, for dreams of going to  
Which with any luck will never come true . . .

The song was of a man who yearned for home and yet paradoxically hoped that he would never get there. This ambivalence towards home is not uncommon. This difficulty in making the decision to return home and to take the first step is one that many people experience. There are many reasons why the decision is avoided and the first step not taken - shame, fear, embarrassment to name a few. So for example a man decided to go for a walk one day and spent the next two decades walking the country roads of southern NSW while his family had no idea what had happened to him. His parents were the ones who really suffered, never knowing what had happened to him, always hoping that someday he would find his way back to them. The pain of the family at home is the shadow side of a person's decision to stay away from home. To ease the pain of home and to encourage young people to make the decision to come home, the Salvation Army developed a program of free phone calls at Christmas, a time when family absence is especially felt.

Sadly too many people choose to leave their homes and families and many more are forced against their will. Sadly, too many who can make the choice to go home don't.

We are starting the season of Lent and this is both the time to recognise our lostness and to focus on our journey back to our home with God.

We are at the Ash Wednesday end of the season, and here the focus is upon  
- our state of separation from our home with God which has resulted from sin and pride  
- God's call to all people to realise where they are and to decide that they are where they should not be.

Jesus is also centre-stage at the start of Lent. At this early end of the season we are faced with the story of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. This is critically important for us who must make our decision to come home. The temptation of Jesus was all about examining his situation and deciding between two possibilities – to respond to Satan's temptation to remain self-orientated or to start the journey home.

Some of you won't be able to identify a moment when you made the decision to return home to God. Many of you can't remember a time when you were not in an at-home relationship. Many of you were baptised as infants but made your decision to stay at home or come home when you were confirmed.

There are some wonderful and encouraging stories of people

making a decisions to return to their heavenly home. Similarly there are even more accounts of people who realise that they are away from home, who think about returning but who decide against it.

Here is the story of a person who thought about it and decided not to head home. During a pastoral visit many years ago I had a coffee with a man and we spoke about the way each of us live and cope with life. He made the claim that he was Satan worshipper and that he had considered the call to follow Jesus and return home to God but had rejected the possibility. When asked why he decided to reject Jesus, he said that following Jesus and retuning home was too costly. When pressed for more information he said that following Jesus required a commitment to kingdom living standards – he would be expected to affirm and pursue forgiveness and servanthood. It was easier he said to be vengeful and selfish than to live God’s way!

An important story of a positive decision to turn to God and head for home is that of the great German theologian Jurgen Moltmann. The young Moltmann was raised in an atheistic home and was a member of the Hitler youth movement. As things were going badly for Germany towards the end of World War II, Moltmann was drafted into the army and sent off to fight with a gun and a “copy of Goethe’s poems and the writings of Nietzsche”. He was soon taken prison in 1944 and not sent home until 1948, three years after war’s end. During that time he felt betrayed by Germany’s leaders

and their promised glorious future. Moltmann was away from his home and he yearned for what he once had and what had been promised. There was however no home to return to. Germany was in tatters in every way and the hopes of National Socialist glory were gone.

Into his despairing lostness God gently nudged him as he read the psalms in a German-language New Testament given to him by an army chaplain. For the first time he read of another ideal glorious home, one with God. “It was not that I experienced any sudden conversion” but “the Psalms gave me words for my own suffering . . . they opened my eyes to the God who is with those who are of a broken heart.” Experiences of God SCM 1988

Moltmann experienced the grace of God who came to him and invited him to stand up and begin the journey to the home he hadn’t even realised was there.



## WORTH THINKING ABOUT

One of the oldest human needs is having someone to wonder where you are, when you don't come home at night.”

When your time comes to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with fear of death, so that when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way. Sing your death song, and die like a hero going home.

Tecumseh

“God is at home; it is we who have gone for a walk.”



## COMING HOME

“He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.”

Malachi 4:6



## **Introduction and Welcome.**

*Group members are invited to share one or more of the following:*

- Introduce themselves to each other.

*Then invite each person to describe briefly their expectations of this Lenten Study.*

*Conclude this section with some housekeeping matters:*

- Establish if any member has any dietary requirements.
- Who will bring supper or morning tea at each session.
- Clarify when we are meeting and where.
- On page seven complete the table of who is attending the group and exchange telephone numbers if people are happy to do so.



## **Opening Prayer. (Say Together)**

O saving God  
who led your people through the wilderness  
and brought them to the promised land:  
so guide us that, following our Saviour,  
we may walk through the wilderness of this world  
and be brought to the glory of the world which is to come,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



## **Getting Started**

In response to the overall theme of the studies –

- Share with the group something about what home means to you
- If you can relate to the story on page 13, share your thoughts with the group.



## **Reading. Luke 4:1-13**

*Ask someone from the group to read the passage or have each member read a verse in turn*



## **Questions for reflection and discussion**

- 1 What do you see in the story of the temptation of Jesus that would encourage someone who is struggling with the decision to turn towards home?

- 2 Do you have a story to share of a friend who made the decision to begin their journey home to God?
- 3 What are some things that you think would prevent a person from making the decision to move out of their isolation and turn home to God?
- 4 Taking note of the words of the song “I Was Born Under a Wandering Star” (see appendix), have you ever experienced an ambivalence about home, yearning for it yet avoiding it?
- 5 Can you identify with Moltmann’s experience of God sharing your brokenness?
- 6 Moltmann said that God gave him the words to express his pain – have any particular words in scripture done this for you?
- 7 If you made a decision to begin your homeward journey, what or who helped you to decide?



### **Looking to Next Week (Housekeeping)**

Who is responsible for refreshments and when and where will you meet next time. As you reflect on the previous session during the next week, new insights and thoughts come to mind. I invite you to record your insights, questions or comments and spend a few minutes at the start of the next session sharing the collective wisdom.



### **Closing prayers (*Share your own prayers followed by this prayer*)**

Eternal God, the beginning and the end of our journeying;  
 Guide us by your Word and Spirit so that we may not wander from your way but walk home to you in safety and come to our eternal rest in you.  
 We ask this through Jesus Christ our journeying companion and guide, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



### **Refreshments and Fellowship.**

#### **Getting ready for next week:**

- Read and ponder the scripture for next week - Luke 9.28-36
- Write a psalm that expresses the pain of those who must leave their homeland?

## HOMeward BOUND

Author: Denn A. Meneses

THERE IS a magical place in our own private universe that stays at the core of our being no matter where our life's journeys take us.

It is where we seek refuge when the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune have become too much for the soul to bear. It is where we find relief when earthy frills and bodily ills gnaw at the very fabric of our flawed existence, and our mind becomes drained from the heavy task of struggling to survive.

Home beckons every time the child in us cries out from above the din of conflicting sounds and clashing egos. It is like an unseen hand that lulls us to blissful slumber, a veritable shoulder to cast our never-ending burdens upon, an invisible light that warms the innermost recesses of our hearts.

And home, sweet home, was the safest place to be. Inside its protective walls we were shielded from the inexorable pains of growing up, taking it all in, letting go.

Home makes us crave for the food that fed the fire in our belly and stoked the flames smoldering timidly in our mind's eye. The satisfactions we derive from our ego-inflating conquests do not match up with the gentle mercies that home-spun nourishment and down-home country living provide.

And the people we grew up with, they never leave our consciousness through restless time and unconquerable space. They are part of the constant fixtures in our lives, the ones we don't see for years on end but remain etched in the mustiness of our increasingly onerous subsistence, bringing us back to the wonder days when all that we deigned to see through our looking glass was heaven in a wildflower.

We make periodic visits to this beloved place where we gained our rites of passage -- like returning pilgrims or homing pigeons, like gypsies pitching tent for the night, or prodigal souls hungry for a feast. It is where we shed our superficial selves, repair our battered bodies, boost our wilting spirits, fix our tarnished psyches, mend our bruised emotions, change our evil ways.

Indeed, more often than not, we stray too far to places unknown, too far and too wide in search of what we need, what we want, what we would die for just to have - and we return home to find it.