

# Dual Status

A growing number of us, I have discovered, have tasted heaven but returned to (or remained on) earth. We are the ones who have literally "entered into His presence."

Some have experienced that wonderful level of intimacy with God through prayer and revelation. Others, like myself, have been forced upward—out of carnality and selfish living—through personal crises. Some have actually died—or come close to it—and returned like Lazarus from that marvelous place of peace to a world in turmoil.

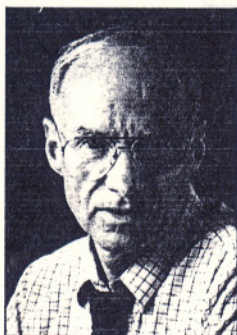
All of us are confused about our dual status: one foot in heaven and another on earth.

We all experience, as I am still experiencing, the problem of re-entry into "life as usual." We are different. Not like other people. We will always be that way. Having tasted from the sweet spring of intimacy with God, we will never again be satisfied with lapping from Earth's polluted puddles.

In Revelation 2:4, 5, the risen Christ chided the pastor at Ephesus for having lost his first love. He told him: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (v.5, NKJV).

We all need, on occasion, to stop and remember what our "first love" was like. We need to recall that overpowering rush of emotion that we now smile and call "puppy love."

I couldn't eat for thinking of her. I'd



**Those of us who have tasted from the sweet spring of intimacy with God, will never again be satisfied with lapping from earth's polluted puddles.**

sneak away, find a phone and talk with her for hours about nothing. Those long nights, lying in bed looking at the ceiling—longing, dreaming. Oh, how I wanted to be with her. I'd rush off to school early to meet her in the parking lot. Just a smile, the touch of her hand, the smell of her perfume would set my heart wildly beating. Nothing mattered: father or mother, studies, sports—all faded into insignificance when I thought of her.

And I was only in the seventh grade.

So it is with those of us who have been to heaven's gate, have heard the sound of His voice, have felt the touch of his saving, healing hand. Nothing else—no love, no desire, no pleasure—will ever match His sweet, holy presence.

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul described it as being "caught up to the third heaven." But to keep him from becoming conceited, God allowed a "thorn in the flesh"—a companion of pain—to accompany him on earth and be with him until his final return. Thorns, it seems, always accompany visits to glory. No one who has walked in his presence will ever be allowed to strut.

Don't regret the limp. Only fear that you lose that wonderful intimacy that came when life was so helpless and death so close.

Francis Frangipane once told me of the beginning of his little church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A spiritual idealist, he committed himself to spend every morning—all morning—in prayer. Then his church grew. (Churches with praying pastors always

grow, it seems.) People with problems began to show up. There weren't enough hours in the day to minister to God and minister to people, too. He cut his prayer time to three hours a day. Then two.

One day, he said, a young friend who had just spent the morning with God stopped by the house. He had a message from God.

"What did God say?"

"God said, 'Tell Francis I miss him.'"

Who among us, having tasted the sweet intimacy of walking with the Father, does not fear those sad words: "I miss you"?

The Bible emphasizes knowing God intimately, as Father. As Daddy.

Jesus often used agricultural terms. Agriculture, in its most basic sense, is not learning how to control the seasons, soils and processes—it's learning how to cooperate with them.

So it is when you've walked with God. Instead of controlling time, you cooperate with time. Instead of controlling people, you cooperate with them. You love with the love of heaven—for you have been there.

Here's my prayer. You can pray it, too.

"Lord, keep me aloft without being aloof. Show me how to remain in orbit with you above Earth's poisoned atmosphere, yet dipping at your command to touch, instruct and heal as Jesus did. May I never again be 'of this world.' May I always—in my own mind and in the oft critical eyes of others—belong to a different kingdom. May I be in the world but not of the world, ministering at your pleasure, marching ever to the sound of the different drummer."

Amen. ■

*Jamie Buckingham and his wife, Jackie, live in Palm Bay, Florida.*