

A House or a Home?  
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

*"It takes a heap o' livin' to make a house a home."* Edgar Guest

Someone has said that home is the place where we're treated the best and complain the most! You can build a house out of bricks, wood and plaster; but it takes love, patience, forgiveness and faith in God to make that house a home. Houses have a tendency to fall apart – they always need paint, repairs and renovations. But true homes can grow together, to become even stronger and more beautiful.

One of the tragedies of life today is over the breakdown of marriage and the family. Homes are turned into hotels, where people with the same name sleep and eat when they don't have something else to do. Sad to say, some homes have become battlegrounds. God never meant it to be that way.

Home is not a place to hang your hat; it's a place to satisfy your heart. It's the place where we don't have to wear masks and pretend, but where we can be ourselves among people who accept us for who we are – and love us just the same. Jesus compared heaven to a home (John 14:2). Home is to be a heaven on earth, but sometimes just the opposite is true.

When I was Pastor at Windsor Baptist Church between 1976 and 1984, I had the privilege of officiating at 84 weddings, far more than in any other church where I have served. I jest, I often reminded these couples that I do not give refunds or allow exchanges. In recent years I have met a number of these couples who have remained true to their marriage vows - "For better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part."

A happy home does not depend on externals – furniture, clothing, swimming pools, and things like that. A contented home depends on the hearts of the people who live there. No amount of furniture or material things can make up for a selfish heart or a mean disposition. As parents, we must begin with our own hearts and make sure they are right with God and one another. Then we can lead our children to be what God wants them to be.

If I could, I would give each couple a Bible verse that tells us the secret for a truly meaningful home. "And be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ sake has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). A kind heart, a tender heart, a forgiving heart: this is the heart of the home. But this kind of a heart is not natural to man. It is only by the grace of God that we can have the kind of heart that makes a blessed home.

With money, tools and earthly materials you can build a house.  
Add love and people to that house and you will have a home.  
Add God to that home and you will have a temple.  
And when Christ is in our hearts and homes,  
He will make them heaven on earth.