



## Award-Winning Author Reflects on the Meaning of Home

Jen Pollock Michel is the author of *Christianity Today's* 2015 Book of the Year, *Teach Us to Want*, which has also been produced as an original video series by RightNow Media. She is a regular contributor to Christianity Today's popular Her.meneutics blog and Moody Bible Institute's *Today in the Word*. She blogs regularly on her website at [jenpollockmichel.com](http://jenpollockmichel.com).

Jen speaks at numerous churches and conferences each year, engaging topics such as practical theology, spiritual formation, marriage, women and calling, and the writing life.

Of her latest book, Jen writes: "*Keeping Place* is, in many ways, a very practical extension of my personal exploration that began with *Teach Us to Want*. As I reflected on my own desires, I realized that home was my most visceral longing. I believe that humans have a primal longing for home, and this book helps readers make sense of that desire through the biblical story, essentially seeing the story of Jesus as a *home* story."

Jen earned her BA in French from Wheaton College and her MA in literature from Northwestern University. She belongs to Redbud Writers Guild and INK. A wife and mother of five, Jen lives in Toronto, Canada, and is an enthusiastic supporter of HOPE International and Safe Families.

Jen Pollock Michel, author of *Keeping Place: Reflections on the Meaning of Home*

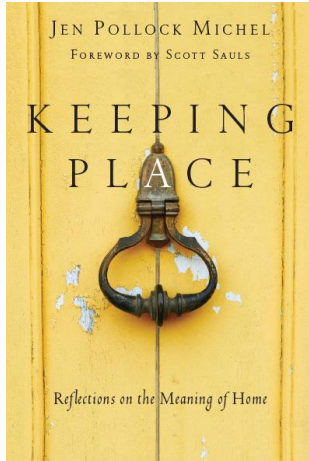
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Visit Jen's website at [jenpollockmichel.com](http://jenpollockmichel.com).

Follow Jen on Twitter: [@jenpmichel](https://twitter.com/jenpmichel).



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## Home for the Searching and the Stranded

“The longing for home is the most fundamental human desire, homesickness our most painful grief,” says Jen Pollock Michel, award-winning author of *Teach Us to Want*. In her latest book, *Keeping Place*, Michel unearths this primal desire, making sense of it by looking at the biblical story. Along the way, Michel shows how understanding the desire for home provides opportunities to share the gospel in compelling ways and to follow in the footsteps of our homemaking God. “This book is about witness and work: the witness of our God’s welcome, the witness of our homesickness, and the ongoing witness and work of the church,” Michel says.

Michel uses literature, social criticism, the Bible, and her own life experience to answer questions such as the following:

- Why is home humanity’s most fundamental desire?
- How can we live today with our longings for eternal home?
- What do you mean by saying that “God is a homemaker”?
- How can we be homemakers, and what does that look like in our life and Christian witness?
- So homemaking isn’t only for women?
- How did your own experience with home lead you to the message and writing of *Keeping Place*?
- Why do you use literature as a source for considering the human longing for home?
- How does *Keeping Place* offer hope to the wanderer and the stranded, from the Syrian refugee to the suburbanite?
- How do our experiences of displacement teach us about home?
- Where do we see the longing for home in the Bible?
- How does understanding home help Christians better share the gospel?
- How does our perspective change when we see what happens from Genesis to Revelation as a story of home?
- What happens when we see Jesus’ story as a story of home in which Jesus exchanged his heavenly home for an earthly one?
- What is the theological significance of viewing the church as home?
- How can the local church practice faithful “housekeeping” and be the host of home for church members and the community?
- How does this book relate to your first, *Teach Us to Want*?

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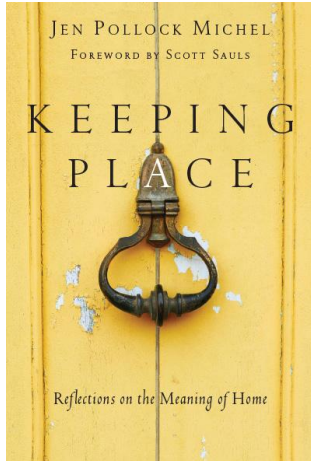


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*Keeping Place recognizes the fundamental human longing for home and connects this desire to the homemaking God of the Bible. The book draws from a rich variety of sources: literature, social criticism, and the author's own life experience. Including a five-session discussion guide and paired with a companion DVD, Keeping Place offers hope to the wanderer, help to the stranded, and a new vision of what it means to live today with our longings for eternal home.*

## Humanity's Oldest Ache

In an interview with the *Atlantic*, Tiffany Watt Smith, author of *The Book of Human Emotions*, described her research on the role that language plays in our emotional lives. As Smith argues, words not only describe how we feel, they distinctly shape how we understand our feelings. As complex emotional beings, we need nomenclature for fear and self-doubt, longing and desire. In short, we must be taught to explain ourselves to ourselves as well as to others.

"One of the emotions I became really interested in when researching the book was homesickness," Smith described in the interview. In the mid- to late-eighteenth century, homesickness was counted a credible source of physical ailment and even considered a possible cause of death. According to medical records, homesick patients experienced the expected symptoms of depression and fatigue, but they also suffered surprising physical ones, such as sores, pustules, and fevers. In severe cases, sufferers refused to eat, growing so weak as to eventually die. Their doctors labeled their deaths severe cases of *nostalgia*—from *nostos*, "homecoming," and *algia*, "pain." (The last mention of "nostalgia" on a death certificate was in 1918.)

Nostalgia may have disappeared from our medical dictionaries, but we have not cured the ache for home. To be human is to know the grief of some paradise lost. Each of us—however happily settled—suffers a foreboding sense of rupture, as if we have been cut off from some hidden source of happiness. We are not unlike Lot, the nephew of Abraham, who parts from his uncle upon arriving in Canaan. When given first pick of the land, without any living memory of Eden, Lot scans the horizon and settles in the well-watered Jordan Valley because it bears resemblance to "the garden of the LORD" (Gen 13:10). Lot suffered nostalgia—or, as the French would say, *maladie du pays*: sickness of [a lost] country.

Biblical words related to *home* can denote physical dwelling, family household, material possessions, as well as geographical and social connections, but these words only hint at the emotional dimensions of the English word *home* and its cousins in German, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, and Dutch. In these languages home connotes much more than geography and material reality; home also describes an emotional state of being. For the linguistic ancestors of the Old Norse, home, *heima*, means more than bricks and mortar. In part, its walls are safety, its windows, welcome. Provided there is intimacy and a sense of belonging, a home can be made in almost any place.

Home represents humanity's most visceral ache—and our oldest desire.

### The Witness of Literature

Instinctive to the witness of Western Literature is the longing for home. Odysseus spent ten years fighting at Troy and another ten years getting home. His son, Telemachus, awaiting his

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*“Homelessness, whether physical or spiritual, is the terror of the elements and the threat of an angry sky. Home is the dry place we are all searching for. Humans need home.”*

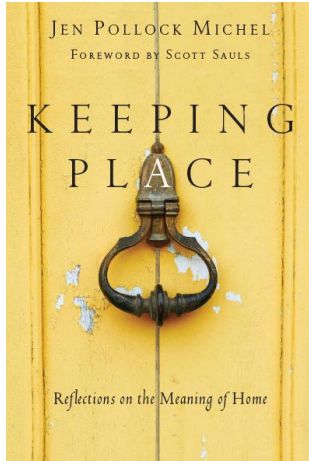
father, defends his mother from the string of suitors wishing against Odysseus’s safe return. He laments his father’s exile: “How I wish I could have been rather son to some fortunate man, whom old age overtook among his possessions.” Telemachus senses the privilege of belonging to a place that serves as witness to our birth and spectator to our death, and understands that home is the place for being recognized, received, remembered. *Missed*. In the face of death, home, as perceived stability, is one hedge against the terror of the *réveil mortel* – the wake-up call to mortality. As writer Julian Barnes has put it in his novel *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, we live with “the vicious awareness that this is a rented world.” The grass withers, and the flowers fade: ours is an impermanent life. At the very least, home is a steady consolation when the lights go out.

The novel is a powerful literary witness to human nostalgia: as philosopher and literary critic George Lukacs has written, the novel is the great form of “transcendental homelessness.” This is to say that from *Don Quixote* to Don DeLillo, the world’s greatest writers are giving voice to our inexorable grief at *lostness* and our irrepressible joy at being found. Homelessness, whether physical or spiritual, is the terror of the elements and the threat of an angry sky. Home is the dry place we are all searching for. Humans need home.

#### **The Old, Old Story of Home**

The biblical narrative begins and ends at home. From the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, we are hardwired for place and for permanence, for rest and refuge, for presence and protection. We long for home because welcome was our first gift of grace and it will be our last. The setting of our first home and our last home testify to the nature of the embodied story God is writing in human history. Because God’s story begins in a garden and ends in a city, place isn’t incidental to Christian hope, just as bodies aren’t incidental to salvation. God will resurrect our bodies, and he will – finally – bring us home. As Craig Bartholomew, author of *Where Mortals Dwell*, concludes, “One of the glories of being human and creaturely is to be implaced.” The “fortune” of home, as Homer puts it, is the witness of Genesis and of Revelation. God will never leave any of his children to homelessness.

– Adapted from chapter one, “Nostalgia”



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## An “Original, Fresh, and Unexpected” Angle on the Human Longing for Home

“*Keeping Place* is both memoir and rich biblical theology, and is, in all of its parts, an aroma of the home we’ve been made and are destined for. With wit, candor, a good bit of humor, and transparent glimpses into *her* home, her history, her travels, her travails, her worship, her marriage, her table, her rest, and her longings—Jen offers an oasis for all of us who are homesick. Most of all, she teaches us to better discern the sights, smells, and tastes of *home* that are all around us right here and right now. In other words, she helps us aim at heaven, so that along the way, a little bit of earth gets thrown in too.”

—from the foreword, **Scott Sauls**, senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville

“Rife with scriptural acuity and sumptuous prose, *Keeping Place* has become my favorite read of the year. Michel’s command of both tradition and the hunger of our age is at once refreshing and comforting. She invites us to embrace the shadow of something more that lingers at the edge of hearts, elucidating how the journey homeward happens only together with those here now and those gone before. *Keeping Place* rivals and bests most contemporary meditations on desiring the kingdom, and Michel has continued in this second book a trajectory of some of the finest scriptural grounding and pastoral care in print today.”

—**Preston Yancey**, author of *Out of the House of Bread*

“What an amazing book this is! Jen Pollock Michel takes us on a journey through Scripture, church history, and the many places she has called home as she paints a picture of God as the ultimate Homemaker. *Keeping Place* stirs and prods us to consider our contributions to establishing a sense of home in today’s world, even as we ache with homesickness for the New Jerusalem God has promised.”

—**Trevin Wax**, managing editor, The Gospel Project, author of *Counterfeit Gospels*

“With her signature depth and grace, Jen Pollock Michel casts a vision of home as both a human desire and a heavenly promise. She calls us to build imperfect dwellings alongside our loved ones in this life precisely because we are destined for a perfect dwelling in the life to come. Women and men alike will find joy in her vision of keeping house. This is a book that invites you in and lets you stay awhile, and I’m grateful for it.”

—**Katelyn Beaty**, former managing editor, *Christianity Today*

“It is one thing to write truth, and another to write it beautifully. With the skilled and hypnotic prose I have come to eagerly expect of her, Jen Michel invites us to consider the sacred space of home and the sacred duty of its keeping. We are seekers of home by design,

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# ENDORSEMENTS

and our homesickness is no accident. Exploring the rhythms of plenty and loss, worship and work, routine and rest, Michel exhorts us, male and female, to be faithful homemakers until such time as we inhabit our true and final dwelling place. In a time when transience and individuality mark the lives of many, she offers here a worthy meditation for the people of God.”

— **Jen Wilkin**, author of *None Like Him*

“Jen Pollock Michel has a unique gift of making theology come alive. She weaves a rich knowledge of Scripture with her own compelling story, offering us a fresh perspective of a God who is the maker and keeper of place, the creator who cultivates the space where we find ourselves and the eternal home we long for. Her perspective is original, fresh, and unexpected.”

— **Micha Boyett**, author of *Found*

“Jen Pollock Michel takes us through the Scriptures as she explores the stories of God’s people displaced, wandering, and longing for home. She captures the tension in all of our hearts: we are longing for something more, something permanent, and something better. We are longing for home — a place. Jen gently encourages us, reminding us that though we are longing, God has given us a home to tend to, people to love and care for, and a table for feasting and sharing. Ultimately, she points us to the only one who can fulfill our every longing — Jesus. Our home is in and with Christ, and one day we will be with him forevermore. Until then, Jen helps us learn to keep place.”

— **Trillia Newbell**, author of *Enjoy* and *Fear and Faith*