



PARADISE HOMELESS CAMPGROUND

Friends,

A homeless campsite named “Paradise” made the news a few weeks ago as the police searched for a suspect in the Bear Creek playground fire.(a) As I read the story I couldn’t help but pick up on the irony of the name. Most people wouldn’t think of a homeless campsite as paradise. In fact when we think of paradise, many people think of the complete opposite. We think of God’s perfect creation, Eden or the new heavens and new earth, something that certainly isn’t attainable here and now.

We may even think of a hard earned vacation, somewhere far away, where we can rest and relax from the hustle and bustle of everyday life as paradise, but not a homeless camp.



For me, last summer, my quest for paradise led me to New Smyrna Beach on the east coast of Florida, where I spent the day with my family, walking in the sand with my granddaughter. It was an afternoon in paradise that was quickly interrupted when a thunderstorm blew in and we had to rush back to our car for shelter.

I think we all long for a place where we can find temporary peace and rest. It may look different for all of us, but when we arrive there, it typically doesn’t meet all our expectations, and that’s probably because of the Fall. When we fell in the garden, Paradise was lost, and whatever we try to do to get it back, no matter how far we travel, no matter how beautiful it may be, something just isn’t right. We simply can’t regain the paradise we need this side of glory.

Paradise being just out of our reach is a good thing. It helps us to *set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*(b) The point is, this is not our home. Paradise is our home and we are not home yet.

It is one thing to compare our everyday day lives to a vacation paradise. It’s quite another thing to compare brokenness in this world to future Paradise. When we look at the problem of poverty in our community like rampant drug use, when we see poverty expressed with people sleeping in public spaces like parks, outside the library, on the sidewalks, or in a campsite that some refer to as paradise, the disparity between brokenness and true paradise is striking.

I first heard about the “Paradise” campsite around twenty years ago from a man that was camping there. He came to the Mission a couple of times a week to take a shower and grab a bite to eat. As I got to know him I asked him where he lived. He told me that he lived in paradise and he described it as some far off exotic place. When I asked him what made it paradise, he said it is a members only place where he and his friends could do whatever they wanted, and everyone else leaves them alone.



We are funded by generous donations from people in our community and we do not accept any federal, state, or local government funds

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A few years later, when the city decided to trim the blackberry bushes and shrubs along Bear Creek "Paradise" was revealed. It is a couple of hundred yards from my house, and today with the overgrowth removed, "Paradise" is little more than an open field on a piece of land behind the ball fields between I-5 and Bear Creek. Sadly this plot of land that some call "Paradise" might be the only paradise they may ever know. For them this piece of land next to I-5 might be as good as it gets.

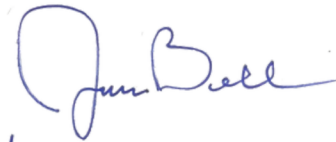
The tag line at the top of our newsletter describes what the Mission is all about: *Reaching the Lost and Gathering the Reached*. Simply put, we strive to reach people who are lost in poverty. Some of them may even be lost in a campsite named "Paradise". And we gather them in and start the journey towards future Paradise to come.

The thing about Paradise, even though it is sometime in the future, we don't simply sit and wait for it to arrive. We journey towards it. The journey to Paradise entails pressing on towards glory, dressed with the armor of God, prepared to face opposition along the way. The journey requires us to fight temptations that seek to rob us of our eternal reward. As we do, we draw closer to our Savior through worship, prayer, and study. We don't take this journey alone. We find other pilgrims on the way, heading in the same direction, to fellowship with along the way. We keep our eyes on the eternal rather than being distracted with the finite. We use our God-given gifts, our assets in our local churches, as well as in the communities in which we live. When we feel the weakness of our decaying bodies, we long for the eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. As we experience the changes in our community, state, country, and world, we realize that things are unpredictable, so we learn to store up our treasures in Paradise where things will never rust or decay. This is not only a journey for our program participants, it's a journey that all of God's children are on. It's a journey for you as well as me.

The state of poverty in our community isn't hopeless because God will continue to restore lives through the work of His people until He returns. Over the past 64 years, about 75 local churches have equipped the Mission to reach the lost and gather the reached and as we work closer with them, we can make an incredible difference for Christ in our community.

This spring and throughout the year we are going to be holding poverty workshops with local churches, so please pray about joining us as we not only stand together, but work together to love our neighbors, especially our neighbors in poverty for the glory of God.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ~Romans 12:2~



(a) <https://medfordalert.com/2023/02/09/bear-creek-park-playground-reportedly-totaled-after-fire/>

(b) Colossians 3:2 ESV

## GIFTS FROM THE HEART

**In honor of Jesus Christ**

by Ken & Diane Capp

**In honor of Donald Schmidt**

by Cheryl Schmidt

**In memory of Jerry Armstrong**

by Mary Armstrong

**In memory of Nancy Mills Bachmann**

by Charmaine & Ron Brackett

**In memory of Earl Best**

by Nickolas & Lindsay Boosalis

**In memory of Brien Blankenship**

by Janice Blankenship

**In memory of Wallace & Lucille Brill**

by Judy Addington

**In memory of Jami Anne Burk**

by Lucille Burk

and by Roberta Hawkins

and by Peter & Margaret Jackson

**In memory of Joe & Karen Carini**

by Gary & Nancy Payton

**In memory of Tim Caswell, Sr.**

by Freda Caswell

**In memory of Jack Chaney**

by Don Minard

**In memory of Gene Covic**

by Bernice Covic

**In memory of My Sister Deb Joy**

by Lynn Baker

**In memory of William F. Earl**

by William G. Earl

**In memory of Ron Eastgate**

by Joanie Ganong

**In memory of Buck & Steve Fixsen**

by Patricia Fixsen

**In memory of Steve Ganong**

by Joanie Ganong

**In memory of Jean Hammond**

by Wes McNeil

**In memory of John Hunter**

by Betty "Beth" Hunter

**In memory of Billie Joe & Joan Hunter**

by Dusty & Debbie Hoffman

**In memory of Roseann Leadford**

by Tom & Marilyn Arthur

**In memory of Pat Lee**

by Robert Phillips

**In memory of Lu Lull**

by Joyce Lull

**In memory of Willard Marsh**

by Marilyn Marsh

**In memory of Jane McCarty**

by Gary & Nancy Payton

**In memory of Billie Ray Nering**

by Ken & Diane Capp

**In memory of Patricia Piter**

by Steve Piter

**In memory of Jack Salter**

by Judy Salter

**In memory of Jerry Scheid**

by Jackie Scheid

**In memory of Duane Shinn**

by Garland & Roberta Shinn

and by Dianne Carter

**In memory of Marjorie Skeen**

by Ken Skeen

**In memory of Karen Squires**

by Ernest Squires

**In memory of Dustin Weidman**

by Donna MacKenzie

**In memory of Garry Wilson**

by Arline Wilson

**In memory of Glenna Winkle**

by Jim & Joyce Witt

**In memory of Mark**

by LeRoy Romero

Thank you for equipping us to restore lives in our community!