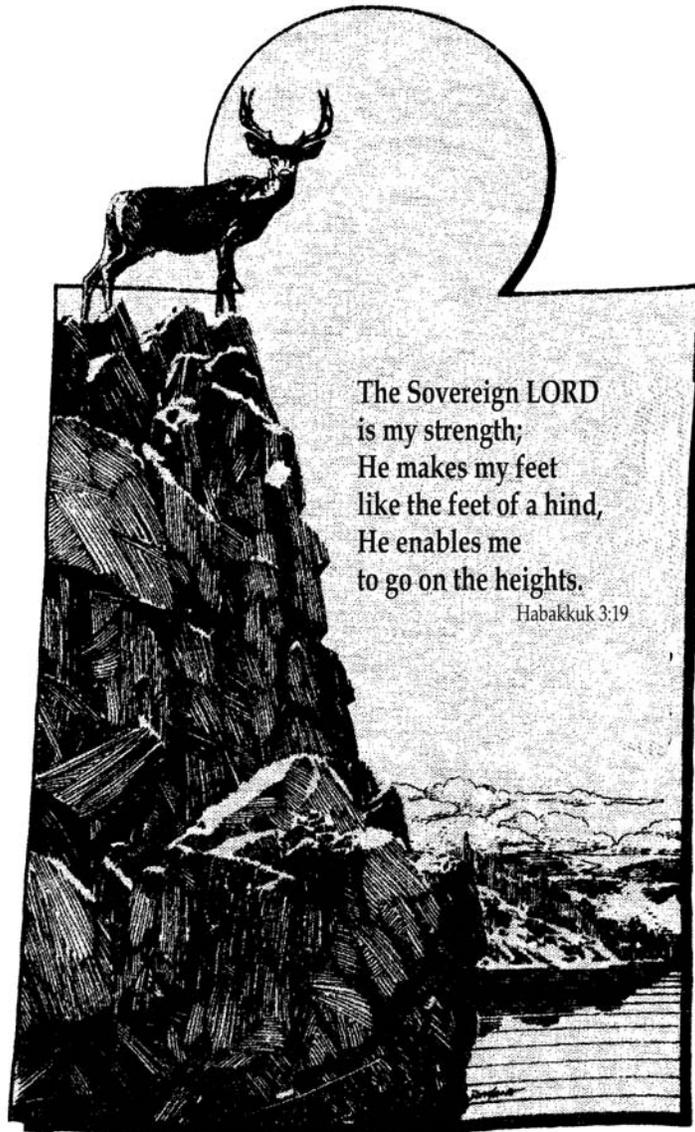


Going to the High Places

Part 2 of Chapter 1. *Invitation to the High Places*



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17. Much-Afraid stared...

A deep abyss may lay between your intense longing to follow the Shepherd and your own perceived shortcomings and inability to trust Him. Mentors and role models who have tasted His faithfulness along the way can strengthen the lame feet of your heart and spur you along in compassionate empathy.

Perhaps in your congregational experiences you have eagerly sought, but failed to find, true servant-leaders. These are the mature people of wisdom and experience who have embraced the transformation our Lord requires, and can help you journey to the High Places. If this has been your sad experience, you and most of the others in your faith community have been hindered until now from leaving the Valley of your Strongholds.

When we surveyed various congregation leaders we found that most were beset by the same prevailing stronghold(s) as everyone else in their body of believers! Leaders in spiritual bondage themselves can only lead people *around the valley*. That's familiar territory to them!

No one can lead you to a place they have never been themselves. Only those who have gone through the transformation process to the High Places, those who have become undershepherds to the Chief Shepherd, can be your personal guides. And there is only one way to guide others: A Servant-Shepherd must have gone to the High Places himself. Don't be surprised if the Shepherd leads you out of the valley of your religious identity on the way to the High Places.

- Recall three or four situations in which someone else's life impacted you deeply. Talk with someone you know about these special people and the effect they had on you .

- Is there anyone in your life right now who role models character traits you'd like to see in yourself? If not, are you willing to earnestly beseech our Father to make you aware of someone (or a couple, if you're married) who can come alongside you on your journey to the High Places?

18. It is quite true..., 19. But, Much-Afraid...

The Shepherd tells Much-Afraid and all of us as well, "Nothing which is an *enemy of Love* can make the ascent and invade the Kingdom." The Kingdom to which the Shepherd refers is not only what His followers will share when He returns!

How often Jesus exclaimed that His Kingdom was *among* His people in the present! The Pharisees, and many other Jewish people, were hoping that the Kingdom would represent the overthrow of the detested Roman occupation. Jesus, however, reminded them that "*the kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:20,21).

Jesus went about *preaching the Kingdom*, the same Kingdom He assured His disciples had been given to them by His Father (see Luke 12:32). While others eagerly questioned if He was the King, Jesus Himself did not parade that fact. He was all too aware that the people were not looking to serve God as King but to *be served* according to their selfish desires. The Kingdom illuminated by Jesus calls for His "subjects" to *turn from* their sin and *self-focus*, be it self-righteousness, self-gratification, or self-fulfillment. Only then can you focus on the King Himself, and permit His Kingdom to rule your heart.

When was the last time you heard someone speak about the Kingdom, the *Christlike transformation* of Jesus' followers as they lovingly trust Him and obey His empowering Spirit? Not only is the King of the Kingdom "the same yesterday, today and forever"; His

Kingdom is unchangeable as well! We each have the privilege to have His Kingdom reign in us.

His Kingdom is “not of this world” because the values and goals of His Kingdom are so opposite to those of the flesh. The values and ways that suited you so well when you were walking in your Valley must be transformed into those of the King as you learn His ways. That darkness has to go, because “nothing that is an enemy of Love can ascend and invade the Kingdom.”

This is an important time to scrutinize for yourself those things that will hinder you on your journey to reach the Realm of Love. We’ve known too many who have begun the journey but never made it into the Valley of Loss, Chapter 13. The way into that Valley is along the “path of forgiveness.” Much occurs between the Valley of your Strongholds and the Valley of Loss. But if you know that in order to embark on the final leg to the High Places you’ll need to completely forgive everyone, it’s good to prepare yourself now.

- Much-Afraid’s personal nemesis was Craven Fear. Who in *your* life do you prefer to never have to encounter again? Why?
- Are you willing to turn from that unforgiveness and ask forgiveness from our Father for having held onto that grievance?

20. Much-Afraid stared..., thru 23. She nodded...

The Shepherd asks Much-Afraid, “Are you willing to be *changed completely...*?” We can never stress too much or too often the importance of transformation. This topic is rarely emphasized in faith communities. Our Lord and His Word, however, stress time and again the *ongoing change* that He intends for our lives as His Spirit leads us onward! And those changes come about most often

in connection with *other people* in our lives.

If you were friends with a married couple who, every time you visited them, pulled out their wedding album to show you, you’d be dismayed after a while. But if they shared *new* pictures and stories, you’d rejoice with them. That’s the same difference between religious stagnation and Christlike transformation.

In the physical realm, changes are immediately noticeable. Think of the times friends have approached you to comment, “Have you lost weight?” or, “Have you cut your hair?” Changes in your *spirit*, however, might not be as obvious to other people (although they *should* be!). It’s those changes in your outlook, your gratitude, your character that give you a platform to testify to the work your Lord has been doing in your life. Those changes catch the attention of people who have known the fleshly responses of the “old you” but now can see *something different!*

Sue: Let me give you an example. During my first year of walking with Jesus my sister and her family came out for an extended visit. Of course I bubbled over with talk of His wonderful goodness, and she patiently heard me out without rolling her eyes too much. One afternoon was a turning point, however. We traveled to a favorite health-food store, where I stood by a s-l-o-w-l-y filling jar of peanuts being ground into peanut butter as my sister and her children browsed.

When we pulled into our driveway and slid open the van door, the jar fell out and smashed on the pavement. I exclaimed, “Oh, we’d better get that glass cleaned up before the kids get cut!” My sister stopped in her tracks and stared at me. “The ‘old’ Sue would have gotten angry and yelled, but you’re so calm and peaceful! All that stuff about Jesus in your life *must be true!*” After that one little incident, she was so much more open to discuss Him!

The work our Father does goes on deep inside you. Sometimes you aren’t even aware that He’s been at work in a certain aspect of your character until an opportuni-

ty arises in which you choose to follow His response rather than fall into your old rut of behavior. That's why it's so important for you to remember that you aren't a slave to sinful ways any more. You have the power through His Spirit to be "*more than a conqueror*", and to "*take your thoughts captive to make them obedient to Jesus.*" It's up to you whether you want to walk in those truths and *act on them!*

As you choose to trust Jesus as did Much-Afraid, you discover how life-changing it is to *depend on* the Great Shepherd. Our Father often works through those He has given us as authority figures or positional relationships such as husband or father or boss to help us trust that His will is being carried out under their auspices. In a culture such as that of the independent-minded US, not being the one to always hear *directly* is an affront to our *me-first* disposition.

Think back to the account of Joseph in Genesis. How often was he subject to the will of others so that he could learn to trust in the sovereign hand of God? He was tossed into a pit by his older brothers, thrust into slavery, then cast into prison unjustly. In each of those circumstances, someone in authority over him was the perpetrator of very painful circumstances.

While our Lord showed Joseph much favor in the sight of both the prison warden as well as the other prisoners, he wasn't always at peace to trust God to prevail. At times Joseph had a hard time seeing God's hand at work! Pleading with his fellow prisoner, Pharaoh's cupbearer, to try to get him released, Joseph complained, "*I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and here too I have nothing wrong that would justify putting me in this dungeon*" (Gen. 40:15). True enough words, except that Joseph failed to see God in all of this until years later, and missed the blessed contentment of heart that comes with acceptance.

Let's bring this ahead now to your life. You may not be responsible for the painful relationships by which you're surrounded, nor the hardship of your circumstances. But

our Father is SOVEREIGN! Can you really get hold of that? Just as He was fully capable of preventing any of the painful situations that assaulted Joseph, He could intervene at any moment in *your* life. But Oh! the blessing Joseph received at the end of his jail time when our Father prompted the cupbearer to remember him! And who knows (except our Lord!) for what special purpose this preparation is being done in *you* as your character is being transformed by Him!

Most women, and wives in particular, get agitated if our Father is calling them to trust His Sovereignty to be worked out at the hands of someone else. If you're called by God through His revelation to your husband to wait or to forego an idea or a desire, you're at a decision point to *be transformed*: Do you accept with trust in His Sovereignty or do you chafe inwardly even if you agree outwardly? It's your *trust* that ultimately leads you to the love our Father both wants you to experience and also to give.

- Much-Afraid has no idea what the cost will be to "grow into" the new name she'll receive from the Shepherd. What "new name" abides in your spirit to reflect how our Lord has been at work in your life? What specific changes have to take place in you before that new name fits?
- How do you generally respond when you're denied something by your husband, father, boss? What transformation of character needs to take place in you right now in your relationships and circumstances?

24. Again he smiled...25. As the Shepherd

The Chief Shepherd asks a most penetrating question. "There is still one thing more, the most important of all...Has love been planted in your heart, Much-Afraid?" There is only one way for the self-sacrificing

kind of love that reflects Jesus to become *your* love. *You need the Holy Spirit!*

As Sue and I have traveled to share Hebraic foundations through our seminars, we have found that only 3 in 100 people have the *essential deposit* that is needed to be empowered to love; the Holy Spirit.

Our Father has offered through Jesus a blood covenant that seals the union between Himself and His children who trust Him. He consummates that union much like a marriage is consummated. Through intercourse a husband and wife *become one* in intimate union. Similarly, the Spirit and the follower of Jesus become united as He takes up His presence within. The Spirit's indwelling guarantees that our Father will keep *His* part of the covenant!

That's why Paul can assure us that no charge can be brought against us before God because we are *justified* in Christ. Jesus is interceding for His own, and His part of the love covenant cannot be broken! *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8: 38,39). Hallelujah!

The Holy Spirit is the power of God that is planted in the heart of every follower of Jesus. *He* is the "plant" that grows and blossoms as the Spirit increases His work in you, and the world's hold on you decreases. The fruit of His work in you is *love*.

Perhaps this understanding is beyond your sphere of experience. We recommend you review our March/April 2002 newsletter, *The Covenant Gospel*, to examine once more *your* part in the covenant with Jesus. Unless you embrace the covenant offered in His blood by our Father, you have no indwelling Holy Spirit. Your marriage and other close relationships will lack the love that God would give through you.

- How would you describe to others *your* consummation experience with our Lord through your union with His Spirit?

26. She could thus..., 27. Then will you let...

During our retreat ministry we used a little questionnaire to indicate the nature of a person's love. The questions revealed the level to which someone was an instigator of affection toward others, or whether he or she held back, waiting to receive expression of affection. We found that many were able and willing to grow in *human* love. As others cared for them, they'd reciprocate. Sadly, too many thought this was the pinnacle of Christian love — to be loved in return.

These folks gave themselves a lot of credit for being able to show love to those who loved them back! This is initially all Much-Afraid desired — to be loved in return. But we know that at journey's end we will be able to fulfill Jesus's words, *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (Matt. 5:44).

Jesus helps us distinguish between human love and the sacrificial love His Spirit produces: *"Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'"* (Luke 14:12-14).

Summing up the loving concern the Holy Spirit produces, Jesus tells the righteous *why* they will be welcomed at the Judgment Throne: *"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'"* (Matt. 25:40). Selfless giving is a fruit of your transformation as you head toward the High Places. This is a pattern of Kingdom living.

One of the joys of our 11 years of retreat ministry was encountering a small but growing group of Jesus followers who freely gave themselves in sacrificial love without expecting reciprocation. Each of these special folks shared a common experience. At some point along their life journey each one had undergone deep hurt at the hands of

others. By choosing to forgive as Jesus did, they were able to walk in His *extra*-ordinary love.

- Everyone has in their life some difficult, hard-to-love people. Who are the ones in your life who would be blessed if you showed them expressions of undeserved mercy?
- How can you distinguish between natural human love and Spirit-empowered love? Describe the differences to someone.

28. Much-Afraid shrank..., 29. "That is true..."

The fearful crippled girl recognized clearly that when you love, "you give that loved one the power to hurt and pain you in a way nothing else can." Many of us never get very far on our journey to the High Places because we haven't come to grips with this fact: When we love we are permitting ourselves to be hurt by the very ones we love.

A wise friend once told us, "You can never walk in the fullness of Jesus until you wash the feet of Judas." Judas had been one of the Twelve who had intimate access to the Teacher. He'd traveled with Him, laughed along the dusty road as they walked, experienced His wondrous miracles firsthand. Yet he could still betray Him for material gain.

Someone told us recently, "There is a fine line between love and bitterness." Most of the people who hurt us in life *were* and *will be* people about whom we deeply care.

We have a special word of encouragement if you are divorced, or been betrayed by someone who was close to you, or suffered hurt in church systems. As long as your *blame* of what others did to you is greater than your *biblical responsibility to forgive*, you'll never make it to the High Places.

Too many, no matter what the cause of their bitterness, try to counter-balance the weight of guilt for their own unforgiveness by casting blame on the ones who hurt them. They perceive that the *more* they can blame others, the *less* guilt they'll experience themselves. If that's your situation, our Father will keep you in the prison of your own bitterness until you choose to forgive.



This issue of *blaming others* is why second marriages have an even higher rate of divorce than first marriages: 65%. If you're considering marriage:

Don't marry a person who hasn't gone to the High Places, or isn't interested in joining you on the journey. The consequences are guaranteed to be disastrous!

How simple the Shepherd's reply to both Much-Afraid and to all of us: "To love does mean to put yourself into the power of the loved one and to become very vulnerable to pain." The key is your *response* to those painful circumstances.

Are you willing to prayerfully entrust your beloved into our Father's hands so that He has room to operate? If you try to manipulate your husband or wife into making changes just to make you happy, God will let you fail. He works from the *inside out* to bring conviction and change so that it emanates from the heart. How much more lasting and effective are His ways than your attempts that only yield antagonism and frustration!

- Who has come to mind in this section whom you loved and has hurt you?

- Are you in a situation right now in which you've guarded your emotions from further hurt and letdown, either with spouse, children, friends?

30. She nodded...31. But it is so happy...

It would be wonderful (you might think) if our Father could just zap you with Christlikeness. Then you wouldn't have to undergo the accompanying trials and disappointments and difficult choices as you interact with family and neighbors and coworkers.

For instance, how often have you cried out for patience, only to find yourself drowning in a sea of people who exercise your patience muscles! Even a cursory examination of scripture awakens in you a sense of wonder at how often Leviticus 19:18 is repeated in the Newer Testament: "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" (See Romans 13:9; Matt. 5:43; Matt. 19:19; James 2:8.)

The *love* that is repeated in these verses isn't just a warm sentimental feeling. It's the self-denying work of our Lord Jesus in your heart that prompts you to respond with *actions* that evidence His life in you! At some point you'll even have love enough to obey His example: "*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (Matt. 5:39b).

Much-Afraid had been "miserably content" when all she had to concern herself with was herself. But the Shepherd was drawing her out of herself to be changed into the character of Him Who sacrificed all He was to show His vast love!

That's what *loving your neighbor as yourself* does to you on your pilgrimage. As you choose to trust Him to do *with* and *in* you whatever will yield much fruit for His glory, you are changed. But that change can paralyze you with fear of the unknown! Your loving trust in the Shepherd is *the only thing* that helps you overcome your fear of the unknown and press on.

Paul wanted the followers of Jesus in Galatia to grasp this truth. It didn't matter if

they (or you) were born into a "believing family". The label of Christian means nothing if He isn't *at work in you*. You are transformed into His likeness as you trust Him and obey His lead to follow through what His Spirit and His Word have directed you. With that understanding Paul could write simply, "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is trust expressing itself through love*" (Gal. 5:6).

Remember, the love the Shepherd was describing is the kind only the Spirit can produce in us — *agape* love. "It is happy to love even if you are not loved in return. There is pain too, certainly, but Love does not think that very significant."

You may be going through this pilgrimage with a person who has hurt you exceedingly, particularly your spouse. Look deep within yourself to determine if you're harboring any guarded feelings toward him or her. Perhaps you too are much-afraid that if you allow yourself to be vulnerable to express sacrificial love, you'll be taken advantage of.

But fear not! As the apostle closest to Jesus wrote, "*Perfect love casts out fear.*" That's the kind of love that only He can grow in you. Don't let your obedient trust depend on anyone else's response to you. Walk in peace as you purpose to set those fears aside. As you choose to trust, your spouse will see the changes and recognize that they *had* to come from Him! And Jesus is looking for *both* of you to make this journey together. Neither one of you will make it the High Places without the other.

- Proverbs 19:11 states, "*A person's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.*" What record of offenses are you keeping against a loved one?
- Are you willing to lay this record at the foot of the Cross to be consumed and brought up no more?

32. Much Afraid thought...thru 34. A thrill...

"If I let you plant the seed of love in my heart..." The choice to trust the Shepherd or to cave in due to fear of pain raged within Much-Afraid's heart. Despite His obvious patience and tender regard, the righteous requirement for the thorny seed to be implanted in her heart did not change. In fact, the Shepherd said nothing that would minimize the reality that His love produces pain.

Note that the *seed* of love was planted, not the whole plant. A seed represents potential. The potential of a vegetable seed doesn't yield an edible product until the right requirements are met: soil, moisture, fertilizer, cultivation. Without these necessities, the seed will always remain dormant.

The world may offer a counterfeit substitute religion — the promise of a whole plant, ready to make your life better. But it's a lie. The false "life-improver" gospel of today only *demand*s; it never swells the seed into the self-sacrificing love that our Savior promises.

The true seed from Him offers blossoms of joy and peace and hope regardless of your circumstances. Your life situation might never change — just ask our persecuted brethren — but the spiritual fruit in your heart becomes mature and hope-giving.

- Unfulfilled expectations from your past can hold you back from fully trusting Jesus because of fear that your hopes will be dashed. What unfulfilled expectations of previous religious experiences are hindering you in your walk with Him?
- Think deeply. Are you, like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, willing to press on in your journey even if you never see answers to your heart's desires here on earth?

35. The Shepherd...,36. She bent forward...

Do you recall the old song, "I never promised you a rose garden?" That's what the *thorn* of love represents. Perhaps you got married full of starry-eyed romance that somehow wilted after the first few months of reality.

At some point you began to realize that the maturing process of love translates into being on the same team rather than seeing the other as an opponent. Those who never unite in purpose and love end up like parallel railroad tracks that are heading in the same direction. Their rail ties may touch on occasion over the children or the house, but they never overlap in the intimacy of union in heart and purpose that mirrors spiritual union with Christ.

A note about the Shepherd's scarred hands. Jesus could have risen from the dead with all evidence of His suffering vanished. But *we* needed to see those scars as beautiful proof that His loving sacrifice on our behalf bought us freedom.

As you move out of the Valley, take a close look at the scars in your life. You've been whipped and slashed perhaps many times by painful relationships and circumstances. But you'll discover on your journey that those very scars that represent ugliness to you will be transformed into badges of hope as you bear witness to others of the healing power of Jesus.

He doesn't mean for you to forget your past but to be healed in such a way that you can empathize with those who have undergone similar suffering. **THEY** need to know that His healing is complete, and that the sting from the memory can be erased.

Sue: Mike and I have traversed some pretty rocky roads during our marriage that have left lots of healed scars. Yet *because* of the scars we can identify with the struggles of other couples. Ministering out of the testimony of a healed heart is a lot more powerful in a distraught couple's lives than expounding on some concept that you've only read about. So if you're on the brink of despair, take hope! Those scars in your life

can be transformed into marks of ownership by our Lord as you encourage others to take hold of His scarred hands.

- At what “scars” in your life do you look with revulsion, wishing they’d never happened?
- Think ahead now in terms of “healed scars”. How can you envision these scars as being beautiful to others as they become testimony of hope to those who have suffered similar wounding?

37. The seed...38. He answered gently...

By now you’ve noticed that the discourse over love and pain has been going on for some time between the Shepherd and Much-Afraid! Since the seed of love is to be placed in Much-Afraid’s heart by the Shepherd Himself, you might think that the development of love and the other fruit of the Holy Spirit will be produced by *divine intervention*. This is partially true.

Everyone has been let down at some point. All of us must avoid Satan’s trap of emotionally insulating yourself against further hurt. Our Father uses *relationships* to rub up against our rough edges. This reality can be especially painful for wives, who need to see our Lord leading through their imperfect husbands as His “undershepherds” in their homes. An old rhyme captures the essence of life for Christians on earth:

To fellowship above with the saints we love, that is sheer glory.

To fellowship below with the saints we know, that’s another story.

The idolatrous attitude that thinks, “I’m more spiritual than my husband”, will squash the work of God in both you and

your husband! He’ll react in frustration to your resistance and give up carrying the shield of protection for your home. You’ll plod along in anger that he’s not “growing in Jesus” when, in fact, your pride and impatience are the hindrance to your journey as a couple.

As we will see shortly, the Shepherd gives the young woman two perfect companions for the journey, Sorrow and Suffering. How many of the fruit of the Spirit are also *interpersonal*? “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law*” (Gal. 5:22,23). All of the fruit involve interaction with other people in order to mature.

You’ll come to realize in *your own* faith pilgrimage that your human companions are often “Sorrow” and “Suffering” who keep you moving to the High Places.

- Have you ever been told that you’re “emotionally distant” from those in your life who deserve your affection?
- What areas of resistance are you currently erecting against the human companions of Sorrow and Suffering in your life?

39. Much-Afraid looked...thru 41. Then he pressed...

The thorn is placed in her *heart* rather than in her brain. This fact has tremendous significance! In the Valley of your strongholds you relied more on your reasoning than on your trust in our Lord Jesus. The most prevalent of all the strongholds is Deceit — no surprise, since the master of sin is the Deceiver himself.

One of deceit’s most effective weapons is *rationalization*. The voice of rationalization in your brain sounds like, “*If I do this..., then this will happen.*” It always contains an ‘if-

then' clause for you to analyze possible outcomes before you decide to obey what our Father has revealed.

Your transformation along the journey will involve a massive change from reliance on the reasoning of your brain to walking in the trust-filled loving obedience of your heart. And how vital is that motivational heart priority! "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*" (Matt. 5:8). A pure heart responds to the Master without hesitation or rebuttal.

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with **all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind**'" (Matt. 22:37). The love God seeks emanates from your heart first, then your will, emotions and mind.

Your loving trust, not your reasoning, is the way of the High Places. When we get to Chapter 16, Grave on the Mountains, what else but loving-trust would cause anyone to leap into a mist-filled gorge?

I, Mike, say this to you men: You have to let your feelings grow through the journey! Love is not an intellectual motivation. Whomever and whatever you truly value in life, that person or thing occupies an emotional chamber in your heart. "*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*" (1 John 4:7). The love John speaks of is *agape* love — a God-empowered love given to us by the Holy Spirit.

God's love is nothing you can conjure up. Just as Much-Afraid willingly bared her chest to receive the painful thorn, you have to willingly cry out to our Father for His thorn of love to become your motivation as well.

For many years after coming to Jesus I was a fireball of enthusiasm in sharing His Gospel of life. I could corral anyone and drench them with His truth. But the most telling description of my approach was voiced by Sue: "You have great zeal but *no love*." That was true. But how much I wanted to love as Jesus does! I was fearful, though, of what that love would do to change me. When the stronghold of rejec-

tion was demolished, I began, for the first time in my life, to experience and share His *agape* love.

- Would you describe your relationship with Jesus as *mind-oriented* (I know the truth.") or *trust-oriented* (I'm known and loved by the Truth!)"?
- Could you identify with the statement, "great zeal but no love"? Are you willing to cry out now for the thorn of love to penetrate your heart?

42. "Thank you" ..., 43. I am more glad...

The journey, as you probably have seen, is made all the more difficult whenever Much-Afraid doubts the Shepherd. Like Eve, you get yourself into a heap of trouble whenever you *doubt*. You may fear that our Lord perhaps *doesn't* have your best interests in mind, or that maybe He'll withhold His control over everything that affects you.

All that the demons, the voices you responded to in the Valley, need is to instill a seed of doubt in your mind: "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*'" (Gen. 3:1,5).

Eve's sin is anchored on the fact that she entertained doubt about God. Satan knew what would tempt her to sin: the same motivational temptations that John warns *us* about! The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life — each of these was wrapped around that tree that had been declared off-limits for food!

The tempting fruit was pleasing to look at, seemed scrumptious to eat, and could offer the kind of knowledge that only God was aware of. Eve could be in a position to

live by her own decisions, just like God! Aren't our temptations aligned with these as well when we take our focus off Jesus and bite into the lure of worldly gratification and goals and values?

As you move along toward the High Places, you'll discover how important it is for your *trust* to take full possession of each "altar" experience in your life. Otherwise, you'll learn to grumble and complain. This will fester into distrust of God. Keep remembering His promises, and grip them tightly as a shield against those demonic whispers.

If you keep praying, "Take this trial away!" you'll remain a spiritual infant. But if you can follow the example of your spiritual family in the persecuted church, you'll gain priceless insight. Rather than praying for escape or relief, many of these who have been imprisoned for their trust in Jesus pray for the strength to endure so that their loving courage can penetrate the hearts of their fellow prisoners and guards alike!

Think of the impact your life could have on others if you responded to adversity with confident trust in His faithfulness rather than gloomy desperation disguised as a "prayer request"!

Out of His wealth of love the Shepherd gives to everyone who yearns to ascend to the High Places the exact companions and situations they'll need for their transformation. You might look at your companions with disdain or revulsion. But He has given them to you to help you! Your *perception* can deter your ascent. Every irritation, every painful experience is God's tool to help you to:

1. Increase the speed of your dependency on Him.
2. Increase your confidence to trust in Him.

- In what areas are you most vulnerable to temptation: lust of the eyes (the things you want)? lust of the flesh (your perceived relational needs)? pride of life (personal power and recognition)?

- Stop and think for a moment: Is there anything you doubt God and His ability to do on your behalf?

47. He looked..., 48. Then he said...

As your infant grew into a toddler and took his first wobbly steps, your heart swelled with delight! "What a big boy/girl you are!" Each new achievement rejoiced your heart, and rightly so! For that's the joy our Father has in *you* with each wobbly step of trust you take in Him, each trust-filled prayer of gratefulness and dependency on Him.

The process of your maturing in Him is far more important than the calendar date when you yielded your life to Him. It's the same concept as in your marriage. The date of your wedding is a tiny speck on your marital journey compared to the compounded adventures and challenges of daily life together. And your pilgrimage with Jesus — your sanctification of being transformed into His likeness—is mirrored in the Shepherd's words, "No one understood better than he that growing into the likeness of a new name is a long process."

It's wise to weigh the Shepherd's warning at this point: "You are not to take anything with you, only leave everything in order." How many people have you met who go through religious services on Sunday morning but live the rest of the week indistinguishable from those whose god is themselves?

We once knew a couple in which the wife and their best friends, another couple, were ardent churchgoers, but the husband had no interest in spiritual matters. One night as the four of them gathered for dinner the man spoke up. "I know that you think you're Christians and that I'm not, but to tell you the truth, I don't see any difference between you and me!"

Think about all the trappings of your former life that you're still hauling around with you. No backpacks of worldly desires or

fleshly gratifications are allowed on your trip! Count everything as loss for the sake of what you will become on the journey!

And don't set yourself up for a fall by proclaiming to others what you're about on your pilgrimage. It's always tempting to share with other people, especially unbelieving family members, the next new step of faith you're taking. But so many times Jesus admonished His disciples to perform their good works, their prayer, their fasting *in secret* so that their rewards would come only from their Father's hand.

That doesn't mean you should deny it when someone comments on the character changes they see occurring in you. But don't cross the line of "Mommy, Mommy, look at me!" and broadcast the work He's doing in you. Let the work itself testify to His transforming hand on your life rather than you boasting about what a fine specimen you're becoming!

"You must be ready to follow me whenever I come to the cottage and call." The Shepherd is detailing for you the same command. Will you hear His voice? Are you faithful to come before Him in prayer, not just during a set time but also often during your day as Paul says, "*to pray unceasingly*"? Are you eager to spend undisturbed time in His Word (even if you have to get up early) so that *rhema* — His specific word for you — can jump off the page into your heart?

Prayer and life breathed by the Spirit into His Word are the Shepherd's songs that contain His "special message for you".

- In what areas of your life — your attitudes, actions, motivations — might someone who is not following Jesus say to you, "I don't see any difference between you and me?" [Think about your extended family, coworkers, neighbors, classmates, etc.]

- What adjustments do you need to make to your schedule to make room for a healthy prayer life and digestion of His Word so you can hear His voice and follow through on what He tells you?

49. Then, as the sun...

Think back to when you first tasted the life-giving warmth of our Father's forgiveness as His Spirit filled your regenerated spirit. You were eager and ready to follow Him anywhere. The sun shined brighter, and the people you encountered were divine appointments to testify of His love.

But the months slipped into years, and the "shadows lengthened". Your energetic encounters were replaced by church activities and religious practices. The blaze of your first love faded into misty grey. Sound familiar?

That's why you're on the journey at this particular point in your life— to rekindle your love for Jesus and to press on to the High Places of Kingdom living. This is your preparation time to be fully equipped to fulfill His purposes and goals for your life.

- What differences do you see between your time of "first love" when Jesus was your all in all, and now?
- What is the Spirit telling you right now to purpose to set aside because it's distracting you from rekindling your passion for Jesus and His Kingdom?

50. Much-Afraid turned...thru 52. She shrank away...

Don't ever underestimate the intensity of demonic opposition to your determination to walk wholeheartedly in love and obedient trust. The difficulty of journeying

to the High Places and the struggle to have your old identity transformed into the character of Jesus is painful enough.

But you also have an adversary who will oppose your transformation at all cost: *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph. 6:12). You, who want everything Jesus wants for you, are a bullseye target to your spirit’s enemy: *“Then [Satan] was enraged...and went off to make war against ...those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus”* (Rev. 12:17).

The demons are well aware of what you are preparing to do. They can come at you like a wolf pack. Once you have prepared your heart to entrust yourself to the transformation the Lord has long-awaited to accomplish, don’t fiddle-faddle in the Valley.

Internalize the wonderful lesson emphasized here. We’re told, *“Much-Afraid shrank away from [Craven Fear] and shook with terror and loathing.”* The warning is given to her and to you as well: *“Unfortunately, this was the worse thing she could have done, for it was always her obvious fear which encouraged him to continue tormenting her.”* All along your journey you’ll be called upon to resist the demonic attacks: *“Submit [entrust, willingly yield] yourselves, then, to God. Resist [stand firm, refuse to listen to, turn away from potential temptation] the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). Don’t be tricked into thinking that choices and activities that “got you by” back in the Valley will strengthen you on your journey. Those old ways are poison to your spirit!

Even after your strongholds have been demolished, an ongoing alertness to spiritual assault is needed. Temptation gives birth to sin when it’s entertained in your thought life rather than captured and discarded. *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Cor. 10:5).

- Are you able to discern between demonic assaults designed to shatter your faith, and painful trials designed by our Father to burn away dross?

- In light of your current life situation, in which category do your painful circumstances fall?

53. Her white face..., 54. The Shepherd...

Fortunately, Much-Afraid remembered to cry out for help. Let me encourage you from my own experience with the demonic wolf pack: You are never so strong in yourself that you don’t need to get on your knees and cry out to Jesus for help. Nor are you ever so weak that His faithfulness to respond can’t bring comfort and rest to your soul.

Physical size and masculine gender can fetter a man’s awareness of how much he needs the Real Source for his victory against the assault. The most important lesson of your journey is this: The closer you get to the floor in prayer, the greater your success in the heavenly battle!

- Recall a time in your life when you were being overpowered by a wolf pack of demonic assault. How long did it take for you to cry out to the Lord, and to call upon others to intercede on your behalf?

55. Much-Afraid burst..., 56. It seemed...

In the face of temptation Peter stresses your need for personal self-control and resistance. You need to tune in to the discernment of the Spirit so that you not only recognize the “roar” of the lion but stand firm in your choice to follow Jesus. *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers*

throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8,9).

When a pride of lions goes hunting they work as a team to catch their game. They send out first the old lions who are too slow for the attack. The older ones roar to frighten the intended victim *toward* the young swift lions who are waiting to pounce.

Be careful that demonic intimidation isn't driving you *toward* more deadly disaster. I recognize that when I resist and take my stand not to be moved by the assault, I often hear in my spirit these words of powerful encouragement, "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Psa. 46:10a).

- When was the last time that you stilled your heart long enough to KNOW that He is indeed God, and that nothing can come against you that isn't intended to strengthen your trust and dependence on Him?

57. Then, still without looking...

Despair is doubt's twin sister. Refuse to indulge in a pity-party of self-condemnation. Confess your sins and *receive His forgiveness!* If you dwell on your shortcomings and failures, you miss the tender compassion of a very real Father who remembers your confessed sins no more!

How many of us have found ourselves saying, "What's the use...?" Both my parents and Sue's are now in heaven because of their repentant trust in Jesus. I like to think they're among the cloud of witnesses cheering us on, hoping we won't give up on the journey.

A passage from the Book of Hebrews summarizes the issues of pressing on for Sue and me:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before

him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:1-4).

Persevering family in Jesus, there's great joy set before you as you run your journey's course. Don't grow weary and lose heart!

- Is there any lingering area of shame over anything from your past?
- Are you willing to bring that episode to the foot of the Cross and receive the forgiveness and healing that you need to press on?

58. However, when..., 59. It is happy...

In Galatians 5:22 it is no accident that the fruit of joy is found immediately after love. In that sequence of spiritual fruit, these reflections of Jesus' character are intricately connected.

Each individual by himself or herself is uniquely precious to our Father. But if you're married and journeying with your spouse, you'll find a growing strength and power as you press on *together*. Sue and I are two separate individuals, but the real beauty of who we are is *us together in Him*.

- How do you define joy?
- Are you willing to accept God's perspective on joy even if your circumstances never change?

Conclusion to Chapter 1

Getting yourself prepared for the journey in Chapter 1 is similar to the preparations for D-Day during World War II. Many elements had to come together before the Allies assaulted the beaches of Normandy. *Your* preparation to leave the Valley is critical to your success in reaching the High Places. Those men who attacked the beaches did so with *forceful determination*.

If you're to reach the High Places, you need to be confident of your desire to get there. Are you prepared for the identity change that sanctification will bring? Your sanctification means that you'll be separated out, set aside for holy purposes. This requires a change of nature, for sanctification results in the *noble dignity* our Father wants you to experience. Then you can more adequately know Him and represent Him to the world:

*In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man **cleanses himself** from the latter, he will be an instrument for **noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work** (2 Tim. 2:20,21).*

As you get close to leaving the valley for the path to the High Places, we want to

voice a warning: Don't look back to what you left behind. So many of the married couples we've known who managed to leave the Valley returned because the wife kept looking back. Lot's life and those of his daughters were made that much more difficult because his wife turned around to mourn what she'd left behind.

And men, you are not beyond looking back yourselves. The Exodus of the Israelites was all the harder because, as God tested them, they looked back to Egypt for solace. Please, especially as you lose the relationships you had with those who don't want to leave the Valley of their Strongholds and their Religious Identity, **DON'T LOOK BACK!**

The Hinds' Feet allegory is one of the most beautiful road maps our Lord could give to show the nature of the journey and what He has in mind for each of us. To our Lord be all the glory! No one can ever be sanctified in the Valley of their Strongholds. You must *start* the journey in order to be changed.

Father, we commit ourselves to you for the power and endurance to follow your Son, Jesus, no matter what the cost. When times get tough for us, don't let us look back longingly to the Valley. You make all things new, and we cling to your promise. Amen.