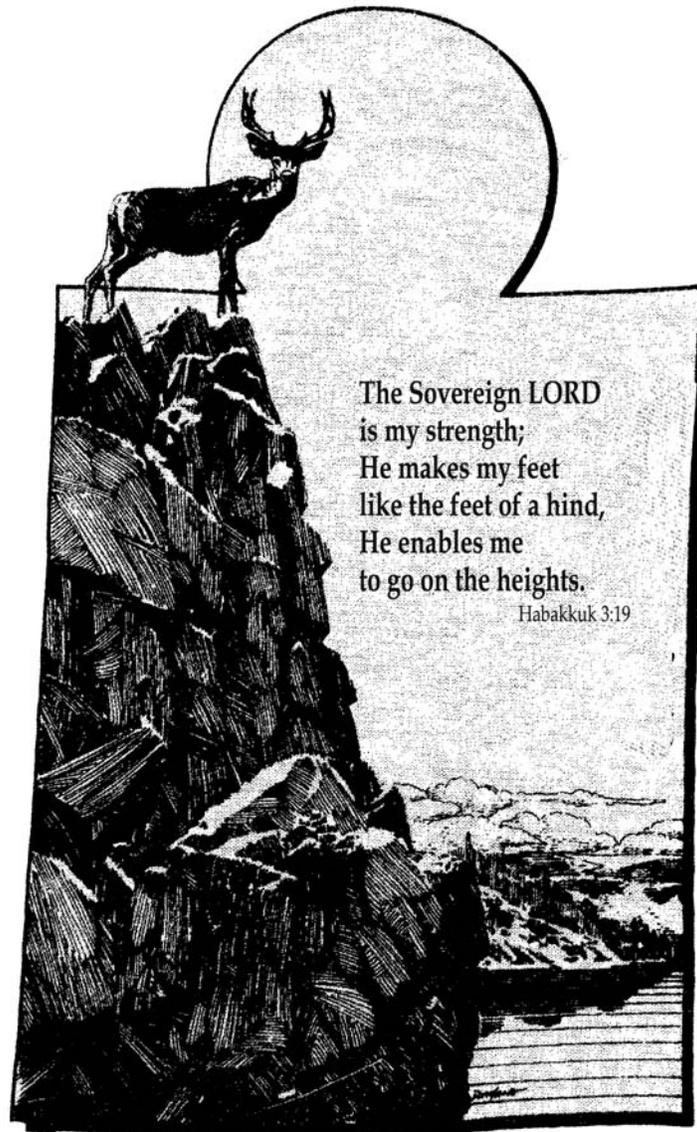


Going to the High Places

Chapter 6 *Detour Through the Desert*



The Sovereign LORD
is my strength;
He makes my feet
like the feet of a hind,
He enables me
to go on the heights.

Habakkuk 3:19



Restoration Ministries International

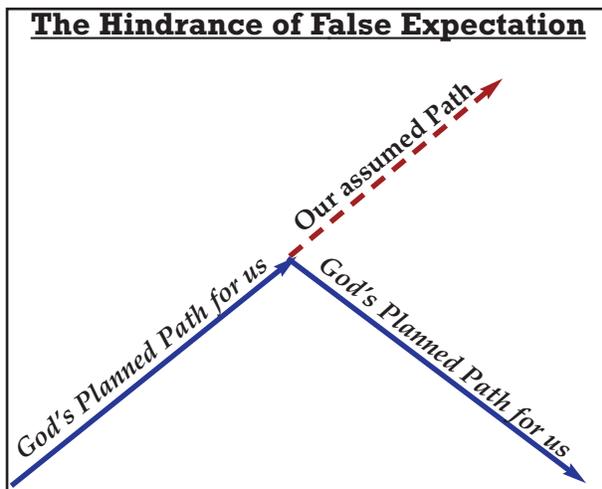
Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

Restorationministries.org

Introduction

Okay, let's be honest. Deserts aren't particularly scenic or appealing at first glance. In fact, they can actually be life-threatening! This is true in the spiritual deserts of our lives as well. Our journey through this barren, arid and seemingly lifeless season is necessary before we can climb upward to the High Places. We are all carrying "**excess baggage**" that's going to hinder us in Christlike character growth — and that's gotta go!

Traveling down into the deserts in your life often begins when you encounter *unexpected situations* that take you by surprise. Unless it's a party, few people enjoy that which they're not prepared for. We are creatures of **expectations** and **assumptions** regarding our future. But this can be detrimental to our willing obedience to follow the Shepherd, especially if our expectations don't align with *His*



planned path for our lives. Taking that first step onto the desert trail calls for victory in the initial skirmish, that is, accepting Divine alteration to our cherished plans.

Once you accept the change to your well-thought out but false expectations, the desert itself and the pyramid can send your resolve fleeing. Your ego and independence are assaulted as you're called to discover the beauty of total submission to our Lord Jesus. We trust, however, that you'll find out for yourself that Egypt is not only needful but good!

1

When Sue and I were preparing to move from Parks, Arizona, the Holy Spirit stirred in Sue that we were "moving to Egypt." At first we perceived that the Lord was hiding us away in a place that demonic forces would never think to look: the "Protestant Papacy", Colorado Springs! Now that we've lived here for 13 years and can see that this was a period He set aside for further refinement in our lives.

We don't usually write about the difficult experiences we go through. Many who live in the Valley have never let themselves follow Jesus into the desert, so they sometimes misperceive our words. But perhaps as you see how our Father has chosen to operate in one particular arena of our lives, you'll be encouraged by His faithfulness in all sorts of situations facing your own life. For instance, while we haven't had a salary since November 1982 and have little in the way of savings, our Lord has gloriously provided for our needs all these years.

Are we exceptional Christians because of this testimony? No, not at all! This is how He told *us* to live, the *rhema* for *our* lives, not for everyone else's. But people who live in the Valley project how they'd feel under these circumstances and get nervous for us. They think we need money! No! Our Father is our Provider, and very creative is He when it comes to meeting needs according to His riches in Glory.

Sometimes He responds by prompting particular individuals to share in His work through us. Their response encourages us that *someone* believes in what we're doing! Other times our Father shows His creative side, almost like a Dad playing with His kids. One time He indicated that we were to get rid of our van, which had become impossible for Mike's disabled Mom to get into. We needed a low, 4-door sedan. At the same time, we needed to reprint *Demolishing Strongholds*. With \$300 to our name, we needed to come up with \$23,000. As Sue and I began to pray, our Lord prompted a businessman from Texas to call. He offered to buy our 800 number because it spelled the

name of His business!

A short while later a jeweler whom we'd never met but who had corresponded with us sold a large diamond at his store. Our Lord impressed on him to send us the proceeds! Add to that a few other responses, and within 2 months we had all the funds our Father wanted us to have to fulfill His purposes for us at that point in time!

We hope you're encouraged by His faithfulness in these accounts. You'll find that you may have to return to the desert of Egypt several times in your life for further refinement. Our loving Lord needs to purge false *expectations* and *assumptions* in you to be useful for His further purposes in your life.

This is a pivotal chapter in your journey to follow in the steps of Jesus. The key is the *total submission of your will* to that of our Lord's if you want to hike out of the desert as "Acceptance-with-Joy".

Chapter 6

Detour Through the Desert

1. After meeting Pride...

Much-Afraid bore a painful limping reminder of her encounter that entertained cousin Pride's thoughts and opinions. Pride's exaggerated view of himself had cowed the fearful girl. She even began to believe his deceptive lies about how she should be treated by God.

Her growing apprehension in Pride's presence almost convinced her that her own unworthiness guaranteed failure in the journey. Then Pride overstepped his bounds by maligning the promises of the King. *That* spurred in her the memory of His love, and drove her to cry out to her faithful Shepherd!

Happily, Much-Afraid's companions were steadfast in their resolve to press on and faithful to offer her their strong arms for encouragement. This time she was willing to accept their help!

Like our frail traveler, you too need both a companion for the journey as well the

willingness to accept the Shepherd's will to continue onward. If you decide to put on the old stiff upper lip and "hobble along painfully" in joyless misery, you'll continue to rise and fall according to your circumstances.

Much-Afraid had been called out from the worldly Valley and chosen to serve our loving Father's purposes. Naively, she (and we) thought that our walk with Jesus would be a superhighway to heaven, bypassing the inconvenient stoplights of temptation and trial.

In truth, however, all we really *know* about our journey is the point to which we have now come, and the glorious home with Jesus that we'll eventually reach. That in-between period is fraught with traffic jams that convince you you're running on empty with flat tires!

But just as true as the promised destination is His faithfulness to never forsake us. *Our* part in the faithfulness covenant is to trust our beloved Shepherd and stop resisting His will! More than that, we must cooperate with Him because He *does* love us and He *is* sovereign! He is fully aware of every rock and pothole along your way. Wrap the hands of your heart around His loving power to sustain and strengthen you so that you can begin with Much-Afraid to make "better progress."

- Which past experiences are keeping you "hobbling painfully" in joyless religious practice because you're looking back over your shoulder in fear of what others are thinking about you?
- You know you've been called out and chosen by our Father for this journey, but are you finding joy conspicuously absent as you begin this phase to the High Places? Are you beginning to feel like a martyr, as though no one around you understands?

2. Then one day..., 3. She stopped dead...

Notice Much-Afraid's response to her first sight of the desert — "amazement and consternation." She was not only taken by surprise that the path didn't at all lead to her expected goal; she was also convinced that the path would be downright hostile!

Relying on only what her eyes could see, an endless expanse of desolation, Much-Afraid recoiled. The only relief from the barren starkness were the ancient towering pyramids — no comfort at all because of their very strangeness.

Maybe that's how you see your life situation right now. Changeless, hopeless, convinced that it's not about to get better any time soon. Let me share a secret with you. The desert really *isn't* barren and lifeless!

Our Navajo friend James taught us a key lesson when we first visited him in Arizona. Accustomed to the lush green trees and verdant pastures of New England, we too recoiled when confronted with intense dryness and brown jagged cliffs of the Southwest.

One dawn James invited us to hike these brown hills — and we were grateful it was early so we could avoid the triple-digit heat! To our amazement James pointed out almost every step of the way fragile blossoms hiding in the shade of rocks, and scampering desert mammals, and tracks and scat of deer and coyotes. It dawned on us that the desert was literally teeming with life — life forms *different* from that which we were used to!

We just needed the eyes of someone who loved the desert to introduce us to a new perspective of beauty. That which is unlovely about your current circumstances may not change. But the work of the Spirit in you can change *your perspective* about your own personal desert.

What appears to be bleak and desolate may actually be a fertile field for your spirit to deepen your dependence and trust in our Father's faithfulness. He may also be wanting to open your understanding to service to Him that's removed from what used to satisfy you.

3

That very special morning as we hiked with James, he revealed that he knew that our hearts were growing in love with his people. He wanted to seal that love by "baptizing" us into the beloved land of the Navajo. As he rubbed the red-brown soil onto our arms, we realized that our Father was transforming our preference for "green" to a grateful appreciation for "brown" — because both reflect His glorious fingerprints!

- Are you so caught up in your narrow perspective of false expectation that you can't see any beauty in the "rocks and sand" of your life? Stop right now and ask the Spirit to open your eyes of understanding to thank Him for the beauty that is in the ashes of your difficulties.
- What idols of "green trees and fertile fields" are holding you back from receiving *with joy* the desert His sovereign hand has planted you in for now?

4. Much-Afraid looked to left...; 5. "I can't go down there"...

How incapacitating *fear* is to moving onward on your journey! Much-Afraid incredulously viewed the unscalable walls as a barrier to her progress, completely missing the passability of the desert trail because she didn't want to go there! Her heart was set on a worthy goal — reaching the High Places with the Shepherd — but the *time* wasn't right. Her spiritually immature heart wasn't yet ready to fully trust the King.

Much-Afraid was still captivated by her misperception of the High Places as instant deliverance from her suffering and weakness! She needed an alteration of understanding that the High Places are oneness in love and trust with the Shepherd, a relationship rather than a location. She also was

being called to *immediate willingness* to overcome any obstacle that would stand in the way of pressing on in and with Him.

Your desert is part of your pathway to the High Places. Plant that reality into your spirit before you take another step! If you've been bamboozled into believing that God's grace means you should never suffer, or that you must be "in sin" because your life is so hard — cast down those lies right now! Our Father's grace means that He loves you so much that He's willing to stretch you to enable you to be conformed to the character of Jesus.

That crucial metamorphosis calls for you to walk in His steps (1 Peter 2:21), the same steps that plodded paths of exhaustion, abandonment, and betrayal. The humanity of Jesus could not have drunk that sorrowful cup were it not for His absolute confidence in His Father's faithfulness to fulfill the joy set before Him. But He knew the heart of His Father and recognized that for this purpose — the redemption and reconciliation of mankind — He had become one of us.

Is your love for Jesus and your trust that our Father is mightier than your circumstances enough for you to press on, even if you can't see beyond the desert horizon of your pain? Let's look at a real life example.

Mike and I were blessed to be in a load-bearing relationship with a dear younger couple who were training up their children at home to love and serve our Lord. Sometimes the exhaustion of this responsibility overwhelm the joyous privilege. We're grateful that we were able to share with them the testimony of His faithfulness to us in educating our son at home for five years. Our stories and those of others we've encountered helped them see beyond the "sand and stones" to discover streams in their desert.

Did their circumstances change after our conversations? Generally not! But their perception was altered so that the pyramids of life which seemed so foreboding became islands of opportunity rather than another Everest to scale. Look for those in your relational realm who can be bolstered by your

recounting His faithful intervention!

- What little jabs are plaguing your spirit that you've perhaps strayed off your Shepherd's path because your life is so hard? Ask our Father for the "wisdom that doesn't find reproach", as James 1:5 promises, in order to discern between the self-inflicted pain of personal doubt and unbelief, and the refining fires designed to burn off dross.
- Recall previous paths in your life journey that looked impossible to follow — but then our Lord intervened mightily. What lessons did you learn about His character and your own that stirred you to praise Him when the crisis was resolved?

6. She then lifted up...; 7. "Shepherd," she said despairingly...

Crying out to Jesus is universal to all of His followers, whether we're motivated by pain, by frustration or by despair. You can count on His faithfulness to respond because of His love for you, but it will always be with *His* answer and not necessarily the one you want to hear! As Paul assured the struggling Philippian believers, "**The Lord is near**", as near as His Spirit in you!

Look at Much-Afraid's phraseology referring to her companions, "the guides *you* gave me." Did you catch that accusatory note of unacceptance and disownership? That stubborn resistance echoes the older brother of the prodigal son. Disclaiming any relationship with his younger brother, the angry brother confronts his father with arrogant accusations: "**This son of yours comes, who squandered your property with prostitutes, and for him you slaughter the fatted calf!**" (Luke 15:30).

The wise father gently but firmly rebukes his prideful son by reaffirming their relational connectedness: "**This brother of yours...**" (v. 32.).

Was the older brother accurate in his appraisal of his sibling's sins? Quite. But did he have even an inkling of the ways and character of his own father in regard to forgiveness and grateful joy? Not a bit. The gracious father laid out the reality of the lad's changed life from his relational death to life, but the older son would have none of it. His own misplaced anger justified his selfish rationale and left no room for appropriate deference to his father's will. He not only didn't see the wider picture from his father's perspective, he didn't *want* to see it!

To Much-Afraid, heading down the desert path in obedient trust was as unacceptable as humility and forgiveness were to the older son. But that resistant misperception of the truth in no way altered its reality. The desert is the pathway to maturity in Jesus, and your reluctance doesn't change that fact!

A wonderful song born on the wings of personal tragedy came out about twenty+ years ago. We were in Israel at the time, rediscovering our love and appreciation for each other even as our Father was preparing a new pathway for us to serve Him. The lyrics of "God will make a way" rekindled our hope, especially as we viewed from our host's upper balcony the arid bony ridges of Judean wilderness.

By a roadway in the wilderness He leads me, rivers in the desert will I see. Heaven and earth will fail but His Word will prevail, He will do something new today! God will make a way where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me. He will be my Guide, hold me closely to His side. With love and grace for each new day, He will make a way.

You may be in a wilderness of sorrow and suffering yourself, or know someone dear to you who is struggling. Or maybe your spirit is desert-dry at the moment. Has it occurred to you that your Shepherd is

your Guide who is holding you closely to His side? His promises are flowing gently alongside you, but you aren't seeing them because of the turbulent waves sweeping across your soul's shoals!

But Jesus never contradicts His Word! The work of His Spirit is the "*streams of living water*" that evidence His presence (see John 7:38,39). You need to decide to drink from them in grateful trust that He does love you enough to walk with you in your desert. He's preparing you for very particular Kingdom purposes!

- Ask Him to give you "Spirit eyes" to see those rivers of refreshment and strength in your desert. Write these down as a remembrance as He reveals them through new awareness of His creative ways of response.

- Describe a time when you were the resentful older son in the parable, grouching because you didn't get what you thought you deserved while someone else who was "undeserving" was blessed. How did our Lord reveal to you your despicable attitude? Are you still tempted to grumble from time to time about your lot in life?

8. He looked at her...; 9. "Oh, no" she cried...; 10. "No," said the Shepherd...

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Prov. 13:12). Whatever you long for, if the culmination or fulfillment keeps getting put off, your anxieties increase and your peace is robbed.

This waiting period can make you vulnerable to voices of despair, doubt, and conjecture about the future. You may even find yourself exaggerating about how long it will take to occur, just as Much-Afraid did: "...it may be months, even years before that path leads back to the mountain again."

If you're not trusting our Father now in the present, you'll be doubly disinclined to commit to Him your future. If you find yourself conjecturing about how the future might turn out, stop and take a look at the quality of your trust in our Lord at this moment. You may need to revisit that classroom first!

Sue: How often have you wished the future was *right now*? You probably felt much as I did as a teen, moaning that you couldn't wait til that time when other people wouldn't be telling you what to do!

And then that moment came, or so I thought — college, freedom to make all my own decisions! Not quite. I discovered that I'd traded one set of boundaries (my parents') for another (course requirements). Sure, I could choose my major, for example, but within that field were very definite parameters of courses that had to be followed if I were to graduate. I could have decided to exercise my freedom and skip such delights as Kinesiology, Physics, and the ultra-boring Philosophy of Education — but then I wouldn't get my degree either.

But because of the goal set before me, I was motivated to submit to what was necessary. I willingly postponed the "freedom" I'd so longed for in high school in order to accomplish a future outcome.

Much-Afraid is on a similar path, only her classroom is the rest of her life. The decisions she makes now will set the stage for whether or not she makes it to her goal, the High Places. Just as I would not have been adequately prepared to teach physical education without enduring those courses I didn't care for, Much-Afraid has some course requirements to undergo if she's to be fully prepared for usefulness in her Shepherd's work. For the "best to become possible", what seems like the worst must be traversed.

- What particular goal(s) has ever been worth it to you to persevere through preparation that otherwise you would have chosen to avoid? For example, a spot on a team? A job promotion? Boot camp? Having to raise

support for a missions trip?

- How resistant are you to the right of an authority person in your life to direct your path without grumbling? Are you able to look beyond that person to see that he/she represents the Shepherd in shaping yieldedness and malleability into your heart?

11. Much-Afraid felt as though...

At some point in your life you may have your own treasured mountains from which our Father has called you away. That pain in your heart was so intense, and your Father knows that! But your level of willingness to follow His will rather than your own desires is a measure of your character development in Jesus.

Sue: The year and a half that we spent on the high prairie in northern Arizona was the heart's delight of this country gal! We awoke each morning to a sunrise that filled the sky and lit up the panoramic mountains that surrounded us on three sides. And to this day I can still smell the honey aroma of the Ponderosa pine bark! Then...

Our Father had prepared another place for us — in a city of 400,000! And my heart echoed Much-Afraid: "You really mean that we [Mike and I] are to follow that path down and down [away from the high prairie] into that wilderness and then over that desert [the city], away from the mountains indefinitely?" I even experienced her "sob of anguish" in my own heart as the rental truck pulled away from the house down the long dirt road through the pines and onto the highway!

But do you know, after the "evening of pain, joy comes in the morning!" As I chose each day to trust that His love for us and His plan for us would bring greater fulfillment to my spirit than the mountains had to my soul, He soothed my heart. AND, He even revealed to us some delightful hiking trails and biking paths just minutes from our city home!

A thought to consider for your own desert experience: Part of His loving kindness to you may be that He *hasn't* shown you how long this dry season will last! If you knew in advance that it was going to be very long, you might give up right now in despair. If it was about to end soon, you might have a "short-termer's" attitude like an eager sailor awaiting discharge and neglect the vital lessons He's teaching you right now.

- Our Father knows precisely where you'll be a year or five from now, and exactly what circumstances will be confronting you. *How* you reach that destination is up to you. What attitude adjustments do you need to make so that this present season of your life won't be squandered by regrets when it's passed?
- What treasured relationships, locales or life situations have you had to leave behind during the past year? five years? over your lifetime? Has that anguish been fully healed, or has it lodged way back in your heart to the extent that you avoid investing your heart in others for fear of painful loss in the future?

12. He bowed his head silently...

At some point in your desert experience you're going to have to realize that our Lord is not obligated to explain to you "why" or "how" all of this distress has to happen. That silence in your spirit is not His reluctance to comfort you but your resistance to follow through in trust on that which He's already confirmed as His will!

Remember, Much-Afraid's desert only *seems* endless. Because she was faltering in yielding her heart's desire, she's even losing her joy in her Shepherd — and He's right

there with her! (Just as His Spirit is right there with and in you!) She's become more addicted to the outcome of reaching the High Places than she is in the very real presence of the One Who leaps there.

The psalmist helps put our focus on the chief matter at hand: "***Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart***" (Psalm 37:4). Only when Jesus is your chief delight will your desires align with His so that you indeed receive with joy what He does give you.

- What desires of your heart are most evident in your thought life? How do they align with your present circumstances?
- How have you grown in patience and in trust that endures as you've found yourself in various desert seasons of your life?

13. Then He answered her very quietly...

We followers of Jesus get caught up in *what* we are doing, or *what* we want our Lord to do on our behalf. We fall into the pit of the *what* at just about the same time our Lord is testing our hearts to see if we *love Him*. What a challenging question for the Shepherd to ask Much-Afraid (and us), "Do you *love me enough* to accept....?"

Sue: I can't tell you how many times I've gotten so absorbed in finishing a project that I've missed the emotional needs of those around me because I was so intent on the "what"! The Jesus in my husband or my son or my friends was left standing in need because I had room only for what I was doing. Don't fall into this trap!

You may feel underappreciated because you aren't being commended for all your efforts, but if the heart needs of those who depend on you are being kicked around or ignored, then what good was the "what"

project you finally completed?

Mike: I wish I could say that I always give Him a resounding, "Yes!" but that wouldn't be true. I very often have to fight my way through attitudes of frustration and grumbling. *"Taking my thoughts captive and bringing them into conformity to Jesus"* is a daily exercise. I get upset with myself because of how often I have to fight through my own emotions until I yield and Jesus has hold of my ambitions. Sometimes I hear a soft word, "I'm glad you wrestled until you got the victory."

- Are you a person who gets totally absorbed in a task or activity to the exclusion of others and their needs? How do you respond when you're interrupted in your activity?
- The agape love of Jesus in you can discern between the needs you have and the needs of others, and which to respond to at a given point. When you get caught up in the "tyranny of the urgent", responding to the biggest pressure rather than to our Lord's quiet voice of guidance, how do you disconnect from that hassle?

14. She was still crouching at His feet...

Much-Afraid has tearfully grasped a vital truth — love and trust are intertwined. How often Jesus impressed this truth on His disciples: *"If you love Me, you'll obey My commands."* John, the disciple whose life was blanketed with love from and for Jesus, repeats this connection as a refrain.

Trust is the obedient outpouring of that which love commands. Your love can't be confined to a statement of creed or to your emotions alone. It must be evidenced by the obedience that acquiesces to the Beloved's voice.

Love that is revealed by obedient trust is

a daily decision — in fact, a many-times-daily choice to heed our Master's will by speaking, thinking and acting as Jesus would. In fact, if only all those who wear WWJD bracelets and flash those bumper stickers really lived by *What Would Jesus Do*, followers of Jesus today would make the same impact on society as did the first century Christians!

Humility is another vital key to our pilgrimage adventure, no matter what your particular representation of that journey fleshes out to be. How our Lord yearns for us to voice and *to mean* the same humble yield- edness to His will that Much-Afraid confesses, "...I do love you, and you have the right to choose for me anything that you please."

- When was the last time you purposely considered What Would Jesus Do-Think-Say before plunging into a situation?
- Can you sense the powerful work going on in Much-Afraid's heart as she chooses to grasp the Shepherd's hand and forge ahead with Him into the fearful unknown rather than stay where she is on the sidelines of safety? What decision is facing you right now that is calling for you to "trust and obey" the Shepherd you love?

15. It was very early morning...

Darkness flees when Light enters it. The darkness of indecision can leave you in perpetual depression if you choose to let it rule you. Or, you can press on into the light the Shepherd has shown you thus far. What you have to lose is your "trembling, rebelling will." Each time you choose to allow your self-preservation and self-determination to be consumed by the fire from the Throne of grace, you're undergoing an altar experience.

As with obedient trust, humble yieldedness is a lifelong heart motivation you must often recapture along the journey. Just when you think you're yielded, our Lord has something else to stretch your loving-trust in Him so that we can be more closely conformed to Jesus.

Life episodes that find you yielding to your Beloved are the "altar" experiences we all encounter along the journey. To come to an altar, you must have something to sacrifice on it. By now you recognize that your sacrifice is *always something of yourself* that our Lord wants placed on and consumed at His altar. It's not so much what you are offering up as the willing attitude with which you offer it. "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*" (Psalm 51:17).

Sue: In the forest across the road from our retreat center was a large flat rock amidst tall trees and low bushes. One afternoon following a precious time of conviction and yieldedness of heart and will, a group of about 20 women joined me at the rock, our communal "altar". We each selected a twig to represent some attitude or behavior that our Father was calling us to cast down, then snapped our twig and placed it on the rock.

These twigs weren't "holy relics" but symbols of joyful submission to our Lord in a particular realm of each woman's heart. By picturing these twigs being consumed by His love, we were able to have a mental stake in the ground that from henceforth that area did not have rule over us.

A contrite heart doesn't make too big a deal about what he or she has placed on the altar. Humility-based love for our Lord Jesus and deep heart appreciation of what He sacrificed for us reveals our offering as insignificant — except for the loving trust that motivated it.

Maybe you need to put on your own mental altar a nagging sense of rebellion that distrusts our Father's best for you. You may even want to do this with your journey partner as a witness so he or she can remind you, if need be, that you're no longer a slave to that old-nature will!

- Are you willing to lay down your own area of rebellion or doubt or fear that keeps you from following your Shepherd as a beloved lamb? If so, mark down this date and your circumstances as a reminder of the obedience that's been prompted by your love for Jesus.

16. "Pick it up and take it ...; 17. Much-Afraid took the stone out of the ashes...

You may not be in the habit of reflecting. Too many of us don't take the time to reflect on the *altar experiences* of our past. The Shepherd had Much-Afraid pick up memorial stones all along her journey so she'd remember her altar experiences. She, like we, need to take ownership of not only what *changes* the Shepherd has made in us, but the *manner* in which He made those changes. ***This is vital!***

The dark little pebble left in the ashes of Much-Afraid's self-will was her own jewel of remembrance. It represented her first step into a *trust that endures*, rather than her former motivation tinged by a desire to leave the painful Valley situation behind.

Be careful that the "anguish of your first surrender" doesn't become a more vibrant memory than the lesson of yielding your loving trust to your Lord! Otherwise, you may find yourself revisiting the arena of your anguish one more time.

And don't let yourself despise this small beginning. It's what you *do* with your thoughts and reflections that matters. Beware of allowing your past perceived failures to weigh you down with a giant boulder. Instead, let your "pebble of remembrance" remind you of the victory that was brought about as your will submitted to His.

A loving submission that *willingly* yields to His Spirit is vital to your spiritual progress. Much-Afraid needed that altar, and she had to build it with *her own hands*. That which happened on the altar—the flame that "came

from somewhere”—was the work of God.

In a similar vein, the Israelites were commanded to bring their sacrificial animals before the Lord's priest. They were required to lay their own hands on it to transfer their guilt, then kill it themselves! That way they would be bloodied themselves, intensely aware of the deadly cost of their sin.

What an impression that must have made on the children who watched this! Then the priest, God's chosen representative, offered the blood and selected parts to the Lord by fire, which consumed the meat and fat as an aroma to heaven.

Only God can “consume” our sins through the blood of Jesus our sacrifice. Our part is to trust in His shed blood on our behalf, and to receive the forgiveness that that blood bought us!

A curious command is given by our Father to the Israelites close to the outset of their wilderness journey. Moses is told to order the people to make on their garments a fringe with a blue thread on each corner. Every time they look at their corner fringe tassel they are to “remember all the Lord's commands and obey them, so that you won't go around wherever your own heart and eyes lead you to prostitute yourselves; but it will help you remember and obey all my commands and be holy for your God” (Numbers 15:37-40).

We all need reminders of our Lord's faithfulness to lovingly set parameters for our lives, as well as the previous situations that stirred us to violate His ways. Make sure your own “heart and eyes” don't lead you to spiritually “prostitute yourself” to set Him and His commands aside to pursue your own gratification!

- As you reflect on your altar experiences, do you cringe that our Lord may ask you to place more on His altar in the future? Or, do you cherish the character change He was able to accomplish in you at each altar along the way?

- What would be the first memorial stone to go in your little bag?
- Do you find yourself spending more time over past regrets than in gratitude for His faithfulness to forgive and to cast the guilt of those sins behind the Cross?

18. Then they began the descent...; 19. They reached the desert...

A long journey begins with the first step. The Red Sea parted at the first step of trust when Moses obediently held out his staff. The floodwaters of the Jordan River gave way at the first step of the ark-bearers. And Much-Afraid's heart was refreshed as she took her first step of descent into the desert.

Her obedient trust in the Shepherd provided the basis for the subsequent “sweetest joy and comfort” *despite* the continued accompaniment of Sorrow and Suffering. Peacefully aware of His Presence even in the midst of her uncomfortable surroundings, the Shepherd's song melted away her pain.

Study the lyrics to this song that's set to Solomon's Canticle. The loved one is a closed garden, a shut-up spring, a sealed fountain, a wasted orchard. How true of each of us, cherished by His grace yet vessels of *unfulfilled potential* to bless others!

Modern western Christianity focuses on self-fulfillment, self-esteem, self-gratification — products by which no one else is blessed. Whose spiritual thirst is slacked by a spring that's boarded up? Whose heart is refreshed by a dried-up fountain that offers no mist of comfort to a weary friend? And how can anyone even find fruit in an orchard that's run to waste by tangled vines of worldly encroachment?

Yet the Shepherd has great plans for that garden to be an aromatic essence of His power and purpose! Step out in the opportu-

nities the Spirit brings your way so others can praise the Master Gardener for the fruit He's ripening in *your* life!

Rarely does the Holy Spirit spring on you a gift that can't find use to bless others. That abundant living overflows out of His work in you to bring praise to our Father and to bring evidence of His love to others.

- What spiritual gifting has He appointed to your spirit to edify others in the Body of Christ? Peruse Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-13, and 1 Corinthians 14:1-6 for discussion of specific gifts imbued by the Holy Spirit.
- Hymns and Scripture songs focus on the faithfulness and character of our God. What songs in the past have ministered peace, joy or comfort to your heart? Replay some of these songs that so stirred you earlier and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

19. They reached the desert...

Much-Afraid's debilitating weakness diminished because she leaned on the Shepherd. While we all like the image of strolling arm in arm with Jesus, our reality puts Him in the form of brothers and sisters He sends to fulfill your needs.

Sadly, we often miss out on "Jesus" in our midst because we don't recognize Him in the people we encounter. He might be in the weary elderly woman struggling with a heavy shopping cart who rewards your assistance with a grateful smile and a squeeze of your hand. That "good feeling" you get when you've served someone He's shown you is His Spirit in you patting your spirit on the back with a "well-done."

But how about other opportunities He gives you to serve Him, such as praying for the angry driver who cuts you off? You can

be the gracious presence of Jesus to him by exercising self-control and lifting that needy individual up for an encounter with Him.

Note that before Much-Afraid chose to follow the Shepherd to the desert, all she could perceive was pale hot sand. But once she got closer, she noticed shady huts of restful protection from the heat. Had she given into self-will and decided to refrain from descending the path, she would have been forever plagued by her fear to trust Him completely.

Sue: You're probably familiar with Corrie ten Boom's account of her father withholding her train ticket from her until it was time to board. She didn't need it any earlier than that. Our Father's intervention works that way too. Mike and I have found that He generally doesn't stockpile provision for us, and when He does accumulate funds, it's to fulfill a specific purpose He's about to reveal.

The mobile home we'd been renting from an old friend is a case in point. In late April my brother-in-law, who had been handling my invalid mother's estate, told us that funds we'd been holding for her were no longer needed. He also indicated that she'd be blessed if we used them to meet personal need.

Three weeks later, our mobile home's owner mentioned that she'd like us to settle our living arrangement by purchasing the home. Mike and I had been praying for months about whether our Father wanted us to buy it, and His timing of provision was perfect! We also had confirmation from praying friends and our hearts were at rest. To top it off, immediately after we closed on the mobile home, a beautiful double rainbow lit up the sky over our newly-purchased home. To us that was a "smile from Jesus" that His plan was accomplished!

- How were you able to *serve* somebody today because our Lord provided you with an opportunity to bless that person? How were you able to humbly and gratefully *receive* the service of someone He sent to you today?

- Much-Afraid was surprised to see that a blessing which had been hidden from her sight was ready and waiting for her because the need was there. How do you determine if what appears to be the answer to a particular need is really of Him? When did you last receive His provision for a need in a way that prompted you to share the testimony with others?

20. “Much-Afraid,” he said...

Most of the time when you read about Egypt in Scripture you get a sense that it’s a place to get out of, or come away from, or avoid going to.

But wait! Abraham set foot there, as did Joseph. Even Jesus’ parents brought Him there as an infant to escape Satan’s deadly scheme, thus fulfilling prophecy!

The Egypts in your life probably seem like a blast furnace. But only intense heat can melt the silver and gold hidden in your heart to remove the ignoble dross alloyed with them. Only fire can solidify the form of the pot your Master wants to cradle in His loving hands. In fact, only the harsh heat of a forest fire can pop open certain seeds to once again revegetate the land with fresh new growth!

The desert of Egypt is also the place to which our Lord brings you so that no distractions can interfere with what He wants to strengthen in your relationship with Him. We have all been sinful Gomer in a spiritual sense, so Hosea’s prophecy applies to us as well: *“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her”* (Hos. 2:14). Your desert experience is a special time. What you learn in the desert can’t be learned anywhere else.

Valley people, incidentally, have a great aversion to any type of desert experience with our Lord. They prefer the anonymity of

crowds rather than intimate time spent alone with Jesus that brings the courage to press on.

- Are you willing for your present furnace fires to crack open seeds that may take your life and plans in a new direction? How does that thought make you feel?
- When have you tried to forestall the fires of Egypt by running away from a situation or relationship that our Lord had designed for your good?

21. “Abraham, was the first of my servants...; 22. Much-Afraid looked up...

Have you ever studied those seemingly endless genealogical lists in the Hebrew Scriptures and thought to yourself, “Who cares?” Since all Scripture is breathed out by God, it’s a valuable arsenal for your journey with Jesus. Scripture teaches you, convicts you, corrects faults, and trains you to live rightly and justly. As an Ephesians soldier, you need all the spiritual equipment He has to offer so that you’ll be fully prepared for Kingdom work!

So even those lists have a purpose! For one thing, they show us the interconnectedness each of us has with the lineage of Jesus! Who belongs to whom is very important to our Lord, as evidenced by His documentation of all those families, clans, tribes and nations!

None of us was intended to live as a solitary atoll amid swirling seas of unconcerned others. Our names are listed in the Lamb’s Book of life, and I sense that He’s kept track in the spiritual realm of our own genealogy of who “midwived” the new birth of each of us who is listed there!

Years ago in Israel our Lord showed Sue and me the relational foundations which He told us to call “The Hebraic Restoration.” The Restoration is built upon the trust-filled obe-

dience of Abraham. Abraham is the ancestor of all who trust Jesus (Romans 4:17).

If Abraham had to go to the pyramids of Egypt, then all of us as his spiritual descendent must if we want to embrace the trust-filled relationship with our Lord that he did.

From God's perspective, being called and chosen to endure the fires of Egypt to be purified for His use is "a great privilege." He indicated nothing about you enjoying that privilege, but implied everything about you being grateful to be included in that glorious "line of succession" of all who have faithfully endured their afflictions. To these awaits a crown to proclaim their Royal Lineage!

- Can you trace your spiritual lineage? Who was praying for you to encounter Jesus? Who nurtured your interest and quickened your awareness of your need for forgiveness of your sins, reconciliation with our Father, and intimacy through the Holy Spirit? Who helped fill in the ruts of behavior and attitudes left by your old sinful nature?
- Are you willing to contact some of these faithful servants to let them rejoice with you in the work He's been doing in your life?

23. Then all of a sudden...; 24. "Fear not, Much-Afraid..."

By this point on your journey you might be identifying with Abraham and Sarah in their lonely exile as they left all that was familiar to follow their Lord. Or maybe you feel akin to weeping Joseph, betrayed and wounded by his own family!

The great nameless host of others in the procession experienced their own God-earmarked trials as well. The apostle Paul was probably the most rejected servant of God who ever lived, betrayed and abused by Jew

and Gentile alike — yet he completed his race to the victory tape.

How precious a victory for Much-Afraid that she didn't shrink back from the hand proffered to her in the line. As she grasped that hand, the verses that had been hidden in her heart were called forth by the Spirit. Learn a lesson from her. In order for you to appropriate strength from the promises in God's Word, they must be implanted there in the first place!

A casual chapter or psalm here or there will reap only crop failure. For the Word to take root, it must be faithfully implanted, reviewed and implemented so you live by it! The words come to life as rhema — personal marching orders for you — only if you take the time to pray them into your spirit.

If you can't set your hand on your Bible in three minutes time because you have no idea where it is, you'll find little fruit from this *Hinds' Feet* commentary. The encouragement to press on in Jesus comes as the Spirit quickens your spirit to put into action what His Word has already shown you as His will. This little study guide just outlines some points you may not have considered to act upon!

- When was the last rhema — the last specific word from the Spirit earmarked especially for you — that you received? Did you note it down? Purpose to keep a pad of paper by your Bible so you won't lose those God-breathed gems!

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe your zeal to discover meat in the Word? ____ Will you purpose to set aside a block of uninterrupted time each day to feed your spirit from the Word, and then share what He's shown you with your journey companion?

25. After this they went back...; 26. But the Shepherd...

Can't you just picture little Much-Afraid with her Shepherd as they approached the vast ancient pyramid and walked inside? She'd never seen anything like that before, so massive, so unfamiliar. Yet isn't that like our Father to use that to which we're unaccustomed in order to focus our concentration on all the details of the situation at hand?

Sue: I love museums! I love to concentrate totally on each display and take in the intricacies and creativity that went into each exhibit. (I could lose myself in the Smithsonian!) So I can just imagine the intensity of focus in Much-Afraid as she surveyed the granary, her first stop. So many varieties of grain! So many ways of threshing it! And then the grades of flour, each suited to very particular needs!

I like to think that the "finest possible powder" for the "very best wheat" are the faithful followers of Jesus among the Persecuted Church around the world. As I pore over the articles in such publications as the Voice of the Martyrs monthly magazine, I find myself tearfully praying for these devoted family members of mine — and swallowing back gulps of shame at my own petty grumbling.

No, these aren't "perfect Christians" — but they have been living in a way that got them noticed as followers of Jesus! Can I always say the same about my life, the use of my time and resources and energy? No. But the Shepherd has set you and me on a different path in a different place for now, and He asks only that we be found faithful in our walk, even as we participate through prayer and provision for our suffering family.

Some simple ways in which you can be the hands and heart of Jesus are: letters to government officials on behalf of Christian prisoners (include a stick of gum and it will be read!); blankets and clothing for the destitute who have no breadwinner; Bibles, Jesus DVDs, or CDs in their language. It's yet day, and you can minister hope to the least

of these, His family.

- Do you ever get irritated that other believers are so different from you, perhaps in their goals or values or lifestyle? Have you ever considered asking our Father to understand His perspective as to their very different purpose in Him than yours?
- When you hear about the men, women and children around the world who are suffering for their trust in Jesus, what is your response? Are you willing to ask our Father to show you very real ways in which you can relieve their suffering and that of their families?

27. Watching them for a while...

Ouch! All of that breaking and bruising and crumbling hurts! But until the kernels of self-will are transformed into the precious flour of His will, your life will never produce the lifegiving "best wheat bread" that can nourish and feed others.

All of the different facets found in the pyramid, the grinding of grain, the potter's wheel, and removal of dross are designed to perfect us for God's further purposes. *"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).

For many of us the grinding takes longer than we'd like! We're on the potter's wheel far longer than we think necessary, and we are in the fires much longer than any of us wants to take the heat. Let's remind ourselves and encourage each other that our Lord does everything *in accordance with His own will*. The pyramid experience is designed

to help us see how REALLY Sovereign He is.

Two insights result as you grow increasingly aware of our Father's sovereignty:

1. God is *absolutely trustworthy* because nothing is outside of His power or plan.
2. In light of His sovereignty, your will, that is, your own plans and desires, becomes less significant and satisfying to pursue. Joy is found in pleasing Him, in bringing our Father joy! Paul offers us a simple command, "*Find out what pleases the Lord*" (Eph. 5:10).

Men, one facet in particular of our Lord's refining process is found in the proverb, "*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*" (27:17). Men need intimate, loadbearing fellowship with each other. That is, their very character development comes from within the realm of relationship in which biblical confrontation is permitted and cherished.

If you yearn for a man to serve as a resource of wisdom and encouragement in your life, start seeking our Lord earnestly. As this verse implies, you need sharpening!

- How would *you* go about determining "what pleases the Lord"? Do you understand that pleasing Him is not earning grace but pouring out the loving response that gratefulness precipitates?
- If you are a woman, are you willing to join a significant man in your relational sphere in fasting and praying for a mature follower of Jesus to serve as a mentor or brother for this man?

28. "See," said the Shepherd gently...

Dill has a very distinct flavor that permeates the food with which it's cooked. (You can't miss the pungent odor of a dill pickle — nothing subtle there!) Cummin is altogether different in form, and requires a different process to make it useable. Corn for

meal is far more coarse than, say, the powder of fine flour. The corn would lose its unique texture and flavor if it were ground down like wheat. So how does this affect you?

Our Father chooses to use each of us in a very unique way. The apostle Peter had a tough time understanding this. He knew God wasn't haphazard in His dealings with people. (After all, as a devout Jew, the sovereignty of God was not an issue!)

But note his response to Jesus' words about the hard path that lay ahead of him: "Lord, what about [John]?" In so many words, Jesus made clear that their paths would be very different, as indeed they were. Both would pen God-breathed words of life to glorify God and guide Jesus' people to come. And both would pay the ultimate cost of their devotion, but in very different ways.

The various methods for grinding the grain of our lives according to how our Father intends to use us are essential for us to understand. Never should we compare ourselves to others! Now put *yourself* in Jesus' response to Peter: "*If I want him to... (fulfill His purpose for you), what is that to you? You must follow me*" (John 21:22).

Our Lord's loving plan for each of us requires different means to perfect His will in us. Anchor this in your inmost being: ***The journey is all the easier if you do not compare yourself to anyone else.***

- Who do you know at this point in time whose life you'd gladly exchange with yours? Why?
- Are you willing to confess your dissatisfaction with your lot in life and turn from that to receive our Father's forgiveness? He'd love to bathe you with contentment if you'd thank Him from your heart for His sovereign care for you!

29. As Much-Afraid watched the women pounding...

The Shepherd informs Much-Afraid that He brings everyone to Egypt so that He can grind them until they become “bread corn for the use of others.” *Usefulness to bless others—isn’t that the foundation to the servanthood our Lord requires of each of us?* This is the crucial point of all spiritual gifts, that our Holy Spirit giftings be used to edify others. “*So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church*” (1 Cor. 14:12).

Most Hebrew words from Scripture are defined by *how they’re used* rather than what they look like. Our Father didn’t put His people here to contemplate Him or argue fine points of theology. He purposes us to *live out His Word* for His praise. Be the bread that gives life, don’t just talk about it or wish you had someone else’s rye when He’s given you sourdough!

Mike: When I worked as a Controller of a Christian College, a well-known student took a summer job as a servant in one of the large mansions that dots the North Shore of Boston.

One afternoon on his day off he stopped by my office and plopped down heavily in the chair. When I asked him what was wrong, he said, “Did you know I took a job for the summer as a servant?” I nodded and asked, “So what’s the problem?” “The problem,” he stated glumly, “is that they treat me *like a servant*. I have no will of my own!”

The growth of Jesus’ character in you magnifies your desire to be used by our Lord and by others for our Father’s glory. Pride can’t survive the humility of true servanthood. Isn’t it comforting to know that grain isn’t going to be ground forever? Once it is bruised and broken, it’s useful for the Shepherd’s purposes. This same pattern holds for us.

Our June 2003 Newsletter entitled “*Are You Suffering From the Woes?*” addressed, in part, the need for married couples in their 30’s properly preparing to survive their 40’s together. The 40’s are a time of great testing. For most men this period is their season as a

Wounded Warrior. A time of tremendous physical and emotional transition, he enters the Wounded Warrior like a caterpillar. With appropriate help and understanding he can emerge from it a butterfly. The most significant transformation, however, comes in regard to his understanding of God. By the time he finishes this period, he has developed a trust in our Lord that far surpasses anything he could ever imagine.

I entered the Wounded Warrior period in 1990. I was 44 years old. My experience began with a prophecy given to me and tested by the elders of our congregation. After they read it, they said to me, “*You don’t have to do anything about what’s written here. God will ensure that He fulfills His words to you.*”

Before I tell you what happened, let me share an excerpt from that prophecy:

7/23/90

Harken to my voice, my little one. For I the Lord am here to *refine by fire*. For my servant Mike *shall be broken*. I have prepared the fires that I shall make him walk through, and they shall be used to *crush the flesh* in him.

And I promise you that the sweet and fragrant aroma of Jesus shall pour forth as he is *tempered and tried by my Spirit*. And my anointing shall rest upon him in purity and power, and great prophetic words shall be uttered through his mouth. But the testing that is coming upon him shall *scathe him* and *be painful* as I flush out all that is not like me.

What pain as I was assailed with plots and betrayals by close friends and others I’d helped over the years. With each attack the Lord forbade me to defend myself. One day I complained to Him in deep anguish. I heard Him say, “*Read the Book of Acts and find out how many plots against my people occur there.*” I read the book and found 13 plots. He then whispered to my spirit, “*If I permit people to plot against my children, what*

makes you any better than they?" I repented and purposed to yield to whatever He wanted to do to me.

Finally, in the fall of 1993, with our marriage holding on by a thread, the Lord took us to Israel to receive a prophetic message for the United States. The fires ended on December 31, 1993. Fortunately, our Lord brought me to my older friend, Bert Schlossberg, who confronted my rationale and helped expedite my path out of the wounded stage. I had passed through the Wounded Warrior trials and could understand spiritual dimensions I never could have envisioned as a young warrior. Those painful fires had transformed me. At that point our Father gave to us the facets of the Hebraic Restoration which we now share.

I grieve for you men who don't have an older man to serve as iron to sharpen you. Your time in the pit of misery will be prolonged if you don't have a "father" who can bring you up out of the pit of your trials. Your wife and family will suffer needlessly because of your isolation.

For all of you, make this thought a banner in your heart: The truths of the Restoration are ***a river of love given to His children by our Father for healing.*** If you want to wholeheartedly embrace our Father's restorative truths, He needs to remove your earthly desires and pursuits. Self-focused goals and motives only tarnish the love He would pour through you.

- How would you have responded had you been given a prophecy warning you of the refining fires headed your way?
- Have you passed through the wounding stage of your life in which your physical capabilities diminish, your children don't need you or interact with you in the same way they use to, and you and your wife aren't on the same page? How did you handle this? Did you just try to bluff or bully

your way through it?

30. After this the Shepherd took her...; 31. As they watched, the Shepherd said...

One Sabbath while we were in Israel we went to our usual congregational gathering. This particular morning something caught our eye: a potter's wheel and a bucket of clay on the dais.

After a joyful session of exuberant praise, prayer, and sharing, a youngish woman took her place on the chair behind the wheel. We were enthralled as she grasped a hunk of damp clay and explained the nature of clay and potmaking. She forcefully kneaded and shaped the material with skilled nimble fingers as her sharp tools carved intricate designs into the pot's neck and sides. The scraped-off clay that didn't suit her purpose was pushed off to the side.

Before our eyes the shapeless lump of clay had been transformed into a lovely, narrow-necked vessel. So sleek! So perfect! We all oohed her creation. Then, unexpectedly, she produced a hefty blade and slashed the pot with a mighty whack! Each half coupled to the center as we held our collective breath!

The potter smiled. "Did you think I'd keep a vessel that can't be used? This pot is as fragile as crystal *until it's fired!*" And so with us. Our usefulness depends not on our appearance but on our relationship with the Potter whose plans indeed involve fire! The yielded clay must be suited to the Potter's purpose, then submit to the fires of preparation before it can serve Him. The "fairest and finest vessels" have undergone the fires of Egypt all the while securely held in the Potter's hand.

The potter's wheel epitomizes absolute submission. The clay passively yields to the creative whims of the potter. Keeping still hasn't been my strong suit. I find it easier when our Lord gives a prophetic word about where He's leading me! Without His prophetic affirmation I get down on myself and mis-

perceive what He is doing. Then I struggle on His wheel until I cry out in humble yielded trust in His sovereign power and love. May I learn from my beloved Master!

- What sort of “pot” do you envision yourself to be in the Potter’s hand? Describe the shape, color and use of the pot you picture.
- What pains you the most: the firing process at His hand or your regret over the “clay that’s been scraped off” by Him because it wasn’t beneficial to you?

32. Last of all He took her up...; 33. “O thou afflicted...

Only our Father can look at a rough rock of a person and see the brilliant gem inside! Of course, if the rock is left alone it will always be just a rock, not likely to bring praise to God.

However, to the rock that allows the smelter to submit it to the oven’s heat, a dramatic rebirth occurs. Never underestimate the power of the Spirit of Jesus to transform an ordinary person into an extraordinary saint!

Perhaps your life has been more like the gold, which needed only to be refined of its dross. Perhaps this gold is like people who were raised in loving homes, pretty much obeyed their parents and teachers, and went on to live decent lives. When made aware of their sins by the Spirit’s conviction, they submitted to Him gratefully and came through their smelting shining and useful.

But gold is pretty rare. Not many of us fit that category we described! Most of us identify more with the ignoble stones that require a lot of time in the oven. But when we grasp the intensity of love our Lord has for us even while we were yet sinners, we rocks come through our trials “flashing as

though we had received the fire into our very hearts!”

In case you were wondering, you don’t have to ask to be put into the fire. Our Lord loves you too much to let you remain a rock. He knows your reaction to flame is to shrink back for a moment, but He also has set before you a wonderful image of the beauty He can create if you submit.

Just as HE initiates a relationship with you and HE convicts you of sin and makes it detestable to drive you to His Cross for forgiveness and reconciliation, so also HE purges away your dross through refining and remakes your character with His Spirit. All the while His Spirit comforts and encourages you and gives you hope — *if* you choose to listen and to trust!

God’s heat has a way of fanning your desire for holiness. Lukewarmness could never produce that. You begin to be appalled by the dross of your pet sins and worldly desires. You sometimes find yourself repenting and repenting repeatedly. You just can’t stand the iniquity that keeps you from the fullness of your relationship with Jesus. This is the path to holiness, and God’s heat is what gets us there.

- When you first submitted to Jesus, were you basically a chunk of gold that just needed a little smelting to burn off a few sinful habits and attitudes? Or, were you a rough hunk of rock with a few crystals of right decisions here and there that needed a lot of heat to refine?
- Has your willingness to endure the fires increased or decreased over time? When were you last at the point of crying out, “Enough is enough!”

34. “On the last morning...; thru 37. Much-Afraid thought of the things...

Much-Afraid appreciated the wonderful lessons she was learning from her time at the desert pyramid. But still, her surroundings were devoid of anything *green*.

Quite out of character for someone generally fearful, Much-Afraid ventured past the now-familiar tents and huts to explore a secret nook behind a wall. There in the silent sunlight was a surprise of golden loveliness — the solitary little flower!

That little blossom was confident of its Creator’s provision — a lifegiving drip of refreshing water that was eagerly awaited and gratefully received. Only the sovereign plan of a loving Father could have put that seed and that dripping pipe in the same place!

Four adjectives are used to describe that little flower: lonely, lovely, hopeful and brave. The “lovely” part was not a choice; it was predetermined by the Master’s hand. It’s “lonely” status also was not a decision but an inescapable reality. The other two descriptions, however, were entirely volitional.

The plant could decide moment by moment whether to trust in the faithfulness of the Planter to send the drip. Or, it could worry and fret that the water might stop. It could determine to face its precarious existence with courage, or to throw in the figurative towel and flop over in defeat. After all, this was no carefully tended and nurtured rose garden in which the plant lived. No fertilizer or aeration here!

These factors were not lost on Much-Afraid. She herself had no control over her lack of loveliness or even her lonely removal from all that had been familiar before she began her journey to follow the Shepherd. But she could decide if she was going to cling to her trust in the Shepherd’s promises, and if she was going to press on in her journey with ever-growing courage.

Here you are, planted by the sovereign hand of your Lord in a field that’s perhaps not your first choice. A comforting prayer

comes to mind: “God, grant me the courage to change what I can, the serenity to accept what I can’t change, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

The little flower awaiting the occasional drip of water touches my heart. It represents each of us who need a joyful touch from our Lord now and then. Everything may seem dry and empty for a season, but then our Lord intervenes in a way that shouts His love for us!

While I have had “Acceptance-with-Joy”, I can’t say that I have it all the time. It really gets tough when Satan’s hoards come at Sue and me in what we call a “wolf pack attack.” Before we can fully recover, we’re overwhelmed by the onslaught.

Acceptance-with-Joy is the place to which our surrender and yieldedness leads. This goes beyond just having pleasant circumstances. That joyful acceptance comes from deep within your heart where the Spirit brings joy *despite* your circumstances.

- Have you ever been blessed by breaking out of the box of familiarity to explore new territory or a new relationship? Describe how that experience or encounter changed you.
- What changes need to occur in your heart so that you can respond to your life situation with serenity?

37. The tiny plant answered...; 38. Much-Afraid thought...

Sue: Ahh, Acceptance-with-Joy. That name “stole into her heart” to comfort Much-Afraid. The flower’s name would not have had nearly the impact had it been “Acceptance-with-Resignation” or “Acceptance-with-Martyr-Overtones” or “Acceptance-with-Pay-back-Demanded”—all of which I’ve experienced at some time or another!

Much-Afraid was wise enough to realize that although she hadn't been eager to come, the Shepherd had chosen to bring her "for His own purpose." Trusting in Him rather than bemoaning her frailty, she was able to proclaim her own "Acceptance-with-Joy."

And at this point in her odyssey, she commemorates her lesson with a second pebble.

- Recall anecdotes from your life in which you were "Acceptance-with-(anything other than Joy). Have you reached the point in your journey in which joy permeates your heart in spite of your "daily grind"?

- Contrast the threshing floor, the whirring wheel, and the fiery furnace with the offer from Jesus for you to find joy in Him through it all. Are you willing to choose the joy as *your* second pebble?

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you [transform you by His Holy Spirit] through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:3).

We want to conclude this chapter with an illustration of the transformation that takes place on our way to the High Places. When you come into this world, you are composed of spirit, soul, and body. Your soul is your mind, will, and emotions. The journey to the High Places, that is, the sanctification brought about by the Holy Spirit, results in a change of what controls you. From birth your body is controlled by your soul, that is, your mind, will, and emotions. But when the indwelling Spirit is given to you in your second birth, a transformation of control takes place. Now you can be led by the Spirit of God. Your mind, will, and emotions take on a new set of motivations and biblical values. You lose one identity in order to take on a whole new identity. Beautiful, isn't it?

Human Birth

1. Body

2. Soul

3. Spirit

Human Development

1. Soul

2. Body

3. Spirit

Born Again

1. Spirit

2. Soul

3. Body