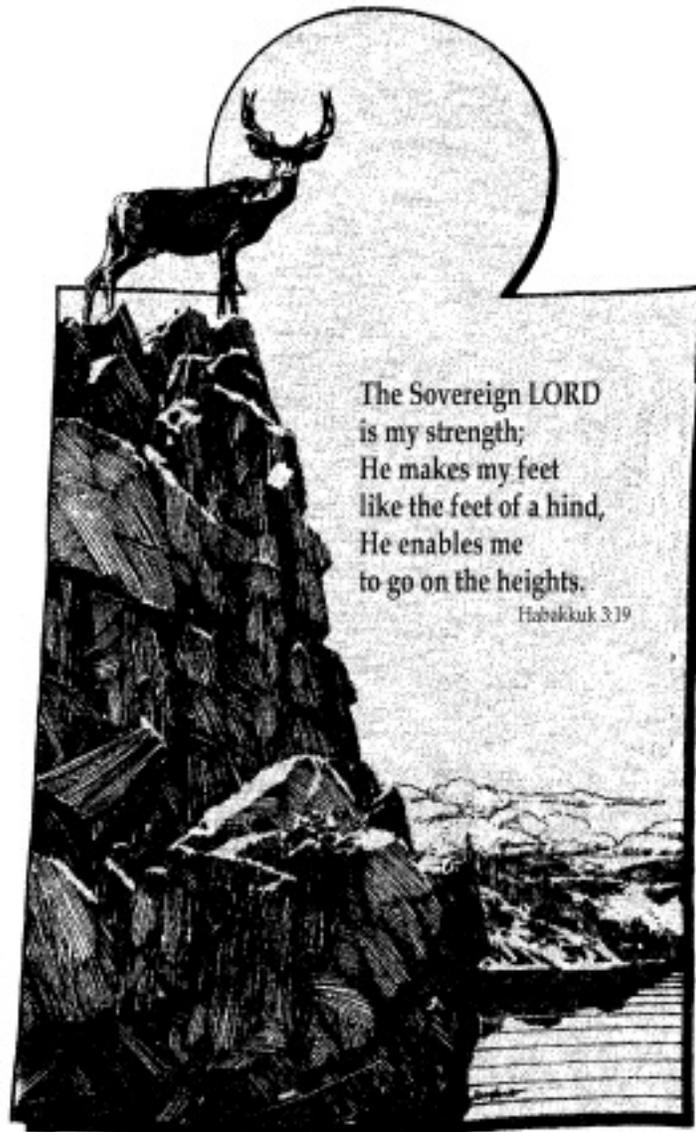


Going to the High Places

Chapter 13 *In the Valley of Loss*



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Introduction

Mike: With this chapter something wonderful becomes solidified in our journey to the High Places. I've been waiting for the opportunity to comment on this chapter since we began writing the series. The Valley of Loss has such significance to anyone who wants to embrace everything the relationship with our Lord entails. You cannot go beyond this point to the High Places without a complete death to, or loss of, everything you once were or cling to tightly.

To reach the end of this chapter will require some deep soul-searching on your part. Don't try to rush through it. Stop and take to heart the issues that Much-Afraid faces, and put yourself in her place.

Chapter 13 *In the Valley of Loss*

1. The mist had cleared from the mountains...

We are told, "The path still led them along the side of the mountain rather than upward..." If you have matured to some degree in your walk with our Lord, you have come to realize that God seldom changes the *conditions* about which we pray without first changing *us*.

Facing arduous or impossible circumstances and situations is the "**Classroom of Increasing Trust in our Lord.**" He uses difficulties to drive us closer in dependence on Him so that we may all the more trust *in* Him. He wants our trust to be a *lifestyle*, not a visit! King David assures us from his own experience, "*Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him and He will act*" (Psalm 37:5).

To Much-Afraid, departing the higher reaches of the mountain was like having to go down to Egypt again. What "Egypt" experiences have *you* found yourself facing yet again?

Perhaps you're familiar with this anecdote. It's worth repeating because it furnishes insight into our Father's way of developing our character into that of Jesus:

A woman visited a godly elder and asked him to pray that she would have more patience. As the older man put his hand on her shoulder he prayed, "Lord, give this woman trials and tribulations that she must pass through..." She interrupted him, "Wait! I asked you to pray for *patience*." "Daughter," he replied firmly, "you can never learn patience *unless* you go through trials and tribulation."

- When you cry out to our Lord during difficult or impossible circumstances, is your plea only that He change your painful predicament? Or, do you strongly consider that He might be wanting to deepen something in your character and trust?
- Describe an episode in your life when things finally seemed to be going well — then POW! An even greater trial faced you. How did you respond to the new challenge?

2. All three halted and looked...; 3. Much-Afraid stood and stared...; 4. Now instead of that...

It isn't unlike our Lord to bring you to points in your life that appear increasingly *more* difficult and impossible. That simple description of what Much-Afraid was facing paints a graphic picture: "even higher than the Precipice of Injury." Hey! That Precipice of Injury was one painful experience itself!

Mike: Sue and I have found during our 40 years of following Jesus that our pilgrimage is like an *upward spiral*. At different times along the journey it seems like you are going through the same circumstances all over again. Your pilgrimage upward has been more like a spiral than a straight path, so you are dealing with some of the same issues, but at a more mature level.

You need to be careful that when the circumstances seem even more difficult, you don't begin to listen to the voices that tell

you that you have *gained nothing* in your pilgrimage. Maybe you sigh painfully inward, thinking that you are right back where you started, that you're no more Christlike now than way back when you first encountered Him. That's what briefly occurred to Much-Afraid as she realized they had to descend into that deep valley, "just as though they had never made a start so long ago and endured so many difficulties and tests."

You may cave in to despair if you don't recognize that the character qualities of Jesus that our Father desires to see developed in His children are accomplished over a *series* of steps and not all at once. In other words, as you repeat similar difficult circumstances in your life, you are given additional opportunity to cultivate a particular character quality. For instance, you seldom develop steadfast, unshakable love or trust in just one lesson!

In the chapters we've discussed so far, Much-Afraid has faced recurring issues. Will she continue to trust the Shepherd? Can she persistently take bitter or fearful thoughts captive? As Much-Afraid and her companions stared down into the Valley of Loss, she was experiencing the "sharpest and keenest test which she had encountered on the journey." Had everything else been a failure? Not at all! She, like all of us, is brought to tests so that the Shepherd can increase our trust in Him through unflagging dependence on His faithfulness.

Many years ago Sue and I used to backpack in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. At the end of an 8-day trip Sue had gotten violently ill from tainted water, so bad that she couldn't carry her pack. On our last night I studied the map and saw how we could cut off considerable distance by bushwhacking across a ridge. Then, by following a river, we would meet the main trail.

Everybody agreed with my idea, so the next morning we crossed the ridge and began to follow the river. After three trudging hours of following the river in what I had estimated should take no more than 30 minutes, we stopped to examine the map

again. To my dismay (and this brought no joy to sick Sue), we were following a *fork* of the river, not the main river. An hour later we finally stumbled upon the main trail.

How does this story apply to our journey? You can't bushwhack from one spiral to another. There are *no shortcuts* to spiritual maturity! God has His ways of developing the character of His Son Jesus in you. You need to discern what it is that the Shepherd seeks to accomplish in you, just as Much-Afraid was forced to do.

All along the way, as she learned the Shepherd's carefully chosen lessons, Much-Afraid underwent her altar experiences. Then she could pick up another stone of remembrance. But in order to press on to the next lesson, she had to follow the path the Shepherd set. It was necessary that she leave behind two other options: to give up, or to bushwhack straight up the mountain.

- What spiral aspect of your life has been a repeat circumstance?
- What particular character trait has been deepened into greater Christ-likeness as you have confronted tests of a repetitive nature?
- When have you tried to circumvent a painful test by bushwhacking in your own strength? What did you learn from your mistakes?

5. As she looked down...; 6. For one black, awful moment...; 7. During that awful moment or two...

Here is a tested and true rule-of-thumb:
If you are going to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, you WILL have times of self-doubt.

Don't let yourself feel as though there is something wrong with you. If you intend to press on in your journey to all our Father desires in your life, you will have your "*Gethsemane experiences*". These are our Father's way of solidifying your trust in Him: "*Not my will, but Yours be done.*"

Often these experiences separate the **Christian in name only** from the *follower of Jesus*. Only a follower will ever be able to answer Much-Afraid's question, "How could one follow a person who asked so much, who demanded such impossible things, who took away everything?" This is a very appropriate question when you are about to enter the Valley of Loss.

If you have been trapped into seeking the acceptance and affirmation of others, this part of the journey is going to be all the more painful. On the other hand, if you are bent on pleasing our Lord by His grace with every step of obedience, then you understand this statement: "She had been following this strange path with her two companions as guides simply because it was the *Shepherd's choice for her.*"

God's call to obedience is usually simple. He provides the barest of information and calls for you to trust and follow through. Too many who, when challenged to explain where and why they are going on the journey, provide more explanation through their own rationale than that which God told them. When you rationalize your obedience, something curdles inside you. You're more likely to give up.

This is why it is important to stay within the restrictions the apostle Paul sets: "*Do not go beyond what [God says]*" (1 Corinthians 4:6b). Our humanly limited rationale tends to divorce us from intimacy with our Lord. Somehow, when we go beyond what He says or has written, we set ourselves *above* Him believing that we have to justify our obedience. At that point we are no longer followers but self-determiners.

We are told that Much-Afraid looked into "an abyss of horror, into an existence in which there was no Shepherd to follow or

to trust or to love." Can you feel the empty pit in her stomach as these thoughts went through her head? I am reminded of a passage in Psalms that has brought me to tears on many occasions. The Shepherd-King had been confronted about his sin with Bathsheba and was brought to conviction. His pain in violating his Lord was so intense that he sobbed, "*Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me*" (Psalm 51:11). What a piercing concern to be assailed with! But David's relationship with, and trust in, his Lord is solid. In the next breath he can implore, "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me*" (v.12).

Sue: You may have felt at some point in your life that you have failed God. After I've wallowed for a while in self-pity or depression, I generally find myself sobbing to my Father because I grieve that I've "let Him down." Yet His ever-present Spirit consoles, encourages and shows me the light of His way — the path of loving obedience that leads to peace and acceptance with joy.

Try to picture yourself as Peter after he denied Christ. Think of what three years of walking with Jesus must have been like for him. Then, in light of all that loving companionship with Jesus, you deny Him. Remember, the loving restoration of Peter in John 21:15-19 is offered to all of us.

- Have you ever experienced a time in which you felt that you were right back where you started in your walk with Jesus? How did you get out of that pit?
- Are you a person who has to seek affirmation from other people to fan your self-worth? Have you found yourself trying to explain more about your steps of obedience than God has revealed to you? How did you feel afterward?

8. “Shepherd,” she shrieked...

The painful thought of living without Jesus is what many of us need to jolt us out of our lethargic spiritual complacency. This is more easily comprehended by those who understand *salvation as a pilgrimage* to be received at the Judgment Throne when your name is proclaimed to the hosts of heaven.

Our Father already knows our hearts and the intensity of our love for Him. But there are times when we ourselves need to know our hearts, and He has just the right tests to reveal to us if He is our all in all. King Hezekiah of old had demonstrated his trust in the God of Israel to deliver them from a powerful enemy. But he would then face a test earmarked for him — whether he could stay humble in all circumstances.

Envoys had been sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask the king about his earlier miraculous healing. We’re told that “**God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart**” (2 Chronicles 31:31) — and what was evident in his heart was pride. And the son born to him during those fateful years after his healing would set a new standard in doing evil in God’s sight.

Tests are sent to us by our Father to help us determine if our trust is the genuine article or just self-centered appeasement through religious practices. So vital is our need for trials to refine our trust that the apostle Peter offers an entire discourse on the topic:

*Through trusting, you are being protected by God’s power for a deliverance ready to be revealed at the Last Time. Rejoice in this, even though for a little while you may have to **experience grief in various trials**. Even gold is tested for genuineness by fire. The **purpose of these trials** is so that your **trust’s genuineness**, which is far more valuable than perishable gold, will be **judged worthy** of praise, glory and honor at the revealing of Jesus the Messiah (1 Peter 1:5-7).*

If we are to press on and truly follow the Shepherd of our souls, each of us must come to the same ecstatic conclusion as Much-Afraid: “You may *do anything*, Shepherd. You may *ask anything* — only *don’t* let me *turn back*. O my Lord, *don’t* let me *leave you*.”

Sue: Do you ever cry out in despair after heartrending intercession seems to have gone unheard? A couple years ago that was a situation in which I found myself. My heart’s desire for my Father to *do something* was so intense that I spent hours kneebound in prayer.

When the circumstance about which I was praying ended far differently than I had hoped for, my Father was still the Solid Rock on which I was standing. I learned once again that it was far more important to keep seeking His face — His unchanging, loving, all-powerful presence — than to focus on His hand and what He might do. And perhaps, just out of sight of my faith, He was in the midst of that painful situation as well.

- Don’t be surprised when our Father tests you. If you are a parent, you frequently want to know what is on the hearts and minds of your children. You want feedback to see what your children are learning from your parenting. What has your Father learned about *your* heart and thoughts toward Him?

- How do you respond when you sense a separation from your Lord? (As Much-Afraid realized, *He* is constant; it’s *we* who move in our trust.)

9. He lifted her up...; 10. “It is no less true...”

When God delays that which He has promised, it hurts. As the proverb laments, hope deferred makes the heart sick. This is

where our faith is stretched. The list of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 defines what that relational weld to our Lord looks like:

*“Trusting is **being confident** of what we hope for, **convinced** about things we do not see” (v. 1).*

*“Without **trusting** it is impossible to be well-pleasing to God, because whoever approaches him **must trust** that he does exist and that he becomes a Rewarder to those who **seek him out**” (v. 6).*

*“All these people **kept on trusting** until they died, without receiving what had been promised; They had only seen it and welcomed it from a distance, while acknowledging that they were **aliens and temporary residents on the earth**” (v. 13).*

Those who keep pressing on in trust earnestly seek Him out, even if all they've cried out for has yet to be fulfilled. That's all part of being “strangers” here on earth, subduing our fleshly desires and refusing to be rooted in the world's values and system.

When Sue and I moved to Colorado Springs into a senior mobile home park, it was the last place on earth we wanted to be. The last time we had lived in this city, a clergyman from one of the larger congregations read *Prodigal Church* and did everything he could to destroy our ministry. But we moved there in response to God's direction to return. As our Ryder truck entered the city limits, the Holy Spirit quickened into my spirit this message: “The religious establishment here is going to come down soon. Who will be here to tell the people the truth?” I then replied, “We will.”

Much-Afraid is told by the Shepherd, “This is the way, walk ye in it,” whether she turns to the right or to the left. This passage has significance for Sue and me. Upon our arrival back from Israel 22 years ago, our spiritual father, Frank Murray, came to us with a prophetic passage: “**Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your**

ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it”” (Isaiah 30:20,21).

Are adversity and affliction strangers to those who hear their Shepherd's voice? Not at all. In fact, these come from His hand to deepen our trust! Those tests become our teachers to reveal His utter faithfulness.

- How would you like to have been Moses? It took 10 plagues before God released him and his people to fulfill God's purposes. What delays are happening in your life to keep you from pursuing your heart's desire? How are you responding to these barriers?

11. He paused for a moment...; 12. She was still clinging to Him..

The Shepherd asks Much-Afraid, “Will you suffer yourself to *lose* or *be deprived* of all that you have gained on this journey to the High Places?” This question is especially poignant for those who still see their lives in terms of what they *have* in this world, rather than in where they are *going*. James warns us not to align our priorities with those of the world: “**You adulterous people, don't you know that *friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God***” (James 4:4).

Have you noticed that the way down into the Valley of Loss is the “**path of forgiveness**”? Forgiveness of everyone and of everything they have done is the only way you can press on to what the Shepherd is calling you to.

At the end of Jesus' discourse on forgiveness in Matthew, chapter 18, He underscores the prison of torment that your unforgiveness keeps you in: “**In anger his master turned him over to the jailers until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart**” (vv. 34,35).

Our Father cannot tolerate unforgiveness in His presence. But He loves you so much that He'll do whatever is necessary to turn your heart away from the soulish satisfaction of bitterness so that you will forgive from your heart. Your decision to forgive then frees His Spirit to flow healing streams over those painful memories and remove the sting from them.

We are told back in the Valley of Humiliation that Much-Afraid cringed whenever she was in the presence of her Fearing relatives. If you empathize with her, there are probably some particular people in your own life whose memory elicits strong emotions such as hurt, fear, anger, shame. These past few months our Lord has prompted Mike and me to pray blessing on some specific individuals whose last contact was under unpleasant circumstances. How faithfully He has been at work behind the scenes since then!

Awhile back we had the opportunity through a book order to renew contact with a man we'd not seen for several years. It was definitely a **"Joseph moment"** of timing and receptivity, for that conversation revealed that great changes had occurred in all of us through the healing power of Jesus! We and he were both able to express gratefulness for the roles we'd played in each other's lives "back then" that had ripened into much fruit today.

Are you familiar with "Joseph moments"? The favored son of Jacob had been cruelly abandoned by his brothers and sold into Egyptian slavery. But through God's intervention and Joseph's steadfast trust in Him, the young man came to power.

Before he chose to reveal his identity to his starving brothers, Joseph needed to know in his heart that they had changed. When that time came, he welcomed them with open arms as their brother. You, too, must wait for the appropriate time to renew relationships, when our Father has tilled the soil of your and their hearts to be receptive and lifegiving.

Aren't you grateful that our Lord isn't

stagnant in regard to other people's lives? Sometimes we get so focused on our little ring in His pond that we forget that He is rippling through the lives of others as well! Any grievance you're lugging about can be a smoldering torch that will flare as an **"enemy of Love"** on your journey. He'll make sure that it explodes into a conflagration that can't be missed until you confront your sin and extinguish it through forgiveness from your heart.

Prepare your heart and spirit *now* for those unexpected contacts with people from your past. If He's revealing some particular individuals who don't evoke love in your heart, ask His forgiveness for that darkness in you. Purpose to forgive that person *from your heart*, and then begin to *pray blessing* from our Lord for him or her.

This may *not* be a receptive time for you to initiate contact, but as you pray with a clean heart and right motive, our Father can release the circumstances and encounters into that person's life to prompt changes. You can be sure that our Father will let you know when your "Joseph moment" is ripe for restoration!

A word about forgiveness. Don't be presumptuous and go to someone who you think has offended you and say, "I forgive you." He or she may not even be aware that they've done anything to upset or hurt you! Rather than stitching up a wound, you may deepen an existing one or create a fresh gash by magnanimously "extending forgiveness" to a person who doesn't even believe that he or she has done you wrong.

Instead, follow Jesus's command. Forgive in and from your heart, just between you and God. We've heard erroneous teaching that tells you to wait until the perceived offender comes to you asking (begging?) you to forgive them. Not only is that prideful arrogance at its worst, but it violates Scripture! Neither the stoners of Stephen nor the tormenters who crucified Jesus ASKED for forgiveness. Rather, our Lord and His faithful disciple pleaded with our Father to FORGIVE their persecutors.

Jesus was very specific when taught His disciples to pray, “*Forgive us our trespasses as we **have already forgiven** those who trespass against us*” (Matthew 6:12). You forgive in and from your heart because that is where *your healing* will take place — from God’s hand! You can’t conjure up self-healing, but He hasn’t called you to, either. As you purpose to forgive in and from your heart, He will seal that wound with a scar that mirrors that of Jesus’ scars. And you will then be equipped to minister from your heart a testimony of healing to others who need to forgive.

If your offender does ask you for forgiveness, you will have already forgiven him or her in your heart. You will be prepared in all truth to offer reconciliation and restoration in that relationship.

At this point in the journey it is critical that you be clean with everyone. Is there someone you recall who stirs flickers (or even flames) of bitterness or resentment in you? Choose to forgive them **now** from your heart, and begin to pray God’s blessings for them whenever they come to mind. You’ll find, as so many have, that **your prayers to bless them will heal your own heart.** This is the only way you can go down the path of forgiveness into the Valley of Loss.

Much-Afraid quotes the wonderfully endearing words of Ruth to Naomi. If you have read our article, “*The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*”, you know that to *live in Covenant* with our Lord means to *live in union* with Him.

Isn’t this the basis of the Parable of the Vine that Jesus relates in John 15:1-17? He speaks of such an intimate attachment that without that union, we cannot bear *any* fruit for Him. Since our Father will not forgive anyone who does not forgive, abiding in the Vine is impossible for those who remain bitter.

- How would you respond if someone from your past who you hoped would forget you ever lived suddenly made contact with you? Would your attitude as well as conversation reflect that you are now a follower of Jesus?

- Are you able to picture the vast incongruity of the grievance you feel justified holding on to when the King of the universe has paid the price of His faultless life for *all the sin of mankind*? How does that question make you feel?
- If you are truly attached to the Vine, describe your fruit-bearing for Jesus at this stage of your life journey.

13. So another altar was built on top of the descent...

The altars we make upon which we sacrifice something to our Lord should never be taken lightly. Not only do they indicate our true repentance — that we have turned away from sin to God — but they are also helpful reminders as we teach others the way to the High Places.

This is what King David proclaims in Psalm 32. Only after he laid his own sins on the altar of repentance would he then be able to teach others: “*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you*” (v.8).

The “death to self” of the altar experience is another point at which our Lord replaces the rotted part of our old nature with the pure beauty of that part of His character. That element of our sin nature is what is being consumed on the altar, and the new slice of godliness is represented in the pebble that is popped into our hearts.

After Much-Afraid tends to her own altar of repentance, she experiences one of the most joyously exhilarating parts of her trip. Much-Afraid “herself sang the last two verses, and her heart was so full of joy...” True joy emanates from complete repentance and produces grateful worship of our Lord. As the Canticle states, a “burst of rapture”

lights up your soul to follow our Shepherd with ever greater clarity and hope.

- Have you ever experienced a near-death situation? How did you feel during it? How did that close call subsequently affect your life?
- If our Lord were to end your earthly life tonight, what would you have left undone? Would you wish in your heart that He'd wait until you had [fill in the blank] ?

14. Considering how steep it was...; 15. Other desires might clamor...

After you've forgiven others from your heart and repented with "*clean hands and pure heart*," your whole surroundings seem to change. What once appeared terrifying is now easy because of your unwavering desire to please the Shepherd. Isn't it amazing what love will do to motivate us?

Consider Much-Afraid's new resolve to "love the Shepherd and to do what he tells me." It's so important that love for our Lord be our motivation to obey Him. Otherwise, obedience becomes the goal rather than love being evidenced by His work in and through us. Revisit Stipulation #4 for the Father to ratify the Covenant with you in "*The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation.*" How forceful and determined are you in your relationship with our Lord?

Are you past the point in the pilgrimage where you are no longer concerned with what He will *do* for you? Have you found yourself only concerned with Him and His presence in your life?

Only when you key in on walking in obedient trust because of your love for Him can you truly be concerned with the eternal outcome of others around you.

Your love for God compels you to want others to experience the same wonder.

Much-Afraid desired with her whole will to *please* the Shepherd. Have you given much thought to how pleased our Lord is when you walk according to His purposes? Sadly, some confuse *pleasing* God with trying to *earn* His acceptance. There is nothing we could do to earn our Father's love. However, *pleasing* Him is a wonderful expression of gratefulness for His loving Lordship in our lives.

Much-Afraid next has a wonderful revelation that is powerful and relative for any pilgrim to the High Places to grasp. We are told, "All the time it is *suffering* to love and *sorrow* to love." An old adage agrees: "Those you love the most will hurt you the most." Suffering and hurt are both a part of loving someone.

You can go through life guarding yourself against hurt by those you love, but they'll never feel as though they're of any value to you. Or, you can place every hurt on an altar of repentance for your bitterness or anger, and ask our Lord to help you love even more. Only by casting off all hindrances to love can you keep your relationships growing in loving union. Without that freedom to love without reserve, you drive in emotional wedges that will eventually destroy those relationships.

There is a song we both like that captures our Lord's desire for personal intimacy with us. It is entitled, "More":

More than the water I love the Fountain
More than the warmth I love the Flame
More than green pastures I love the Shepherd
More than my life I love Your Name
So here I am take my life and glorify Your Name

More than love I want the Lover
More than the gift I want the Giver
More than the healing I want the Healer
More than this song You want the singer
So here I am, take my life, and glorify Your Name

by J.R Vassar, © 1999 Curiously Strong Music

- When you think about heaven or hell, do you think in terms of getting people “saved”, or with helping them experience grateful relational intimacy with our Father and His Son, Jesus?
- Followers of Jesus are called to obey His commands. Which commands is He referring to? How would you know if your life was pleasing to our Father?

16. The next surprising thing...17. Strange enough...; 18. Also, they sang continually...

The Valley of Loss could as accurately be described as “The Valley of Heavenly Peace.” In order to have made it this far, a lot of baggage has had to be left behind. But not only have you had to discard that which was holding you back in your devotion to Jesus, you’ve also needed to discover a whole new way of relating to Him! Isn’t this what Jesus is speaking of when He tell us, *“If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself** and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses his life for me** will find it”* (Matthew 16:24,25)?

People who have followed Jesus to the High Places have seen their concern for others grow in leaps and bounds. Think of this as a proverb:

**The more you die to yourself,
the more you’re able to know
and understand others personally
and meet their needs
as Jesus would meet them.**

In this part of the Canticle we rejoice in the wonder of being attached to the Vine, and of the Beloved’s work to prepare His tree to bear much fruit: “And this will be — when all of me is *pruned* and *purged* with

fire. And where thy choicest fruit tree grows, *Thy pruning knife now wield.”*

Cutting away the selfish carnal nature is painful, even when done by those the Shepherd has put in our lives. These **“pruning instruments”** have the right and the responsibility to expose those areas of our hearts that are unlike Jesus. Yet when your heart is at peace, neither sorrow nor suffering will disrupt your contentment.

Much-Afraid’s presence in the Valley of Loss hasn’t changed but she has, to the extent that her companions now evoke joy in her. She was learning that being at rest in the Shepherd’s will is far more important to her spiritual growth than struggling to reach an outcome.

- How well do you really know those who are close to you? Do they feel comfortable revealing their inner self to you?
- Are you willing to forsake any self-will or preference as far as it concerns God’s will for you? How hard is it for you to be content?

19. It is true...; 20. All this seemed a little strange...

You’ll know you have true peace when you don’t care *where* our Lord is leading you, as long as *He* is leading. But make sure you don’t “spiritualize” His leadership. Our Lord generally puts people in our lives who have been given authority of some sort over us to teach us the freedom and boundaries of godly living. They are His instruments of refinement! Don’t announce that you’re walking in obedient trust in Jesus if you rebel against your husband, father or boss!

So many of us are steeped in an **“outcome-based”** world system. But in your journey with Jesus, you don’t get points for

finishing your race quickly. It's not a competition against others, but a lifelong trip of casting off the old and putting on the new.

The *process* of your growth in Christ-likeness impacts so many others around you. Whereas they knew you as [selfish, lazy, hot-tempered, irritable], you are now [kind, gentle, helpful, serving]. When others see such amazing changes and you give testimony to the intervention of Jesus in your life, He gets the praise and the glory!

Changes in character get noticed!

Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" epitomizes the worldly viewpoint: She couldn't wait for the yellow brick road to get her to the destination. Winnie the Pooh, on the other hand, sees his life journey as a chance to taste the honey and smell the flowers. Do you see the difference? True repentance brings such peace that worldly concerns and outcomes lose their hold on us.

Remember, Jesus is Immanuel, "*God with us.*" His presence by the Spirit through your repentance and desire to live righteously by His grace will always produce love, peace, joy, and heartfelt exuberant worship.

- Where is your mind most often throughout the day? In the past? In the future? Or, in the now? What changes may you have to make?
- Do the words "content" and "at peace" apply to you? Ask those close to you... What changes may you have to make?

21. In answer to her question...; 22. This also rather puzzled her...; 23. Again he smiled...;

If you've "died to self" on the way to the High Places, a visit to the Valley of Loss will not devastate you. Dying to self also means forsaking expectations. If you expect noth-

ing to go a particular way, then you'll appreciate it when it does, and not regret when it doesn't.

Because Much-Afraid was willing to die to her dream of arriving at her goal, she was able to walk peacefully *away* from the High Places in contentment that the Shepherd was with her.

If you're having a difficult time fully trusting our Lord with something, you'll appreciate an axiom I first observed during Sue's and my 11-year retreat ministry:

If you are going to *sweat* something, then God is going to *cause* you to sweat it.

For example, when people habitually sweat financial problems, God adds to their financial problems. His goal is a heart change in which they'll gratefully shift the burdensome weight to Him. Once again, Psalms encourages our trust: "*Unload your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will never permit the righteous to be moved*" (Psalm 55:22).

While the Shepherd's face reflected wonderful compassion, there was also "unflinching determination" toward Much-Afraid. Picture our Lord looking at you and saying, "*The good work I have begun in you, [your name], I will carry it on to completion until the day you see Me face-to-face.*" He doesn't give up on us as we continue to follow Him!

- Is there any concern you can't put to rest? What is it? Who have you talked to about it who will pray with you to come to peace in that concern?
- Are you able to be content just to trust that He's walking in your situation with you, even if the door has shut on a precious dream?

24. When she realized that...; 25. When she remembered this...

To complete the rest of the journey to the High Places will cost you the complete loss of worldly pursuits and death to yourself — not as a self-flagellating martyr but as a trusting son or daughter who knows that His way is the only path to Life. Our Lord has already determined that He is transforming you to be like Him. You can help yourself in the process by studying and applying His Word, and by cooperating with Him in the things He wants to change in you.

Our Shepherd is preparing each of us as His bride — a *perfect* bride. Make it easy for both Him and you in your transformation!

- Much-Afraid reacted with a pang of fear when she realized that the Shepherd would be doing still more in her heart. How does the idea of His “determination to allow nothing blemished or unworthy to remain in the beloved” impact your thoughts about the continuing journey?