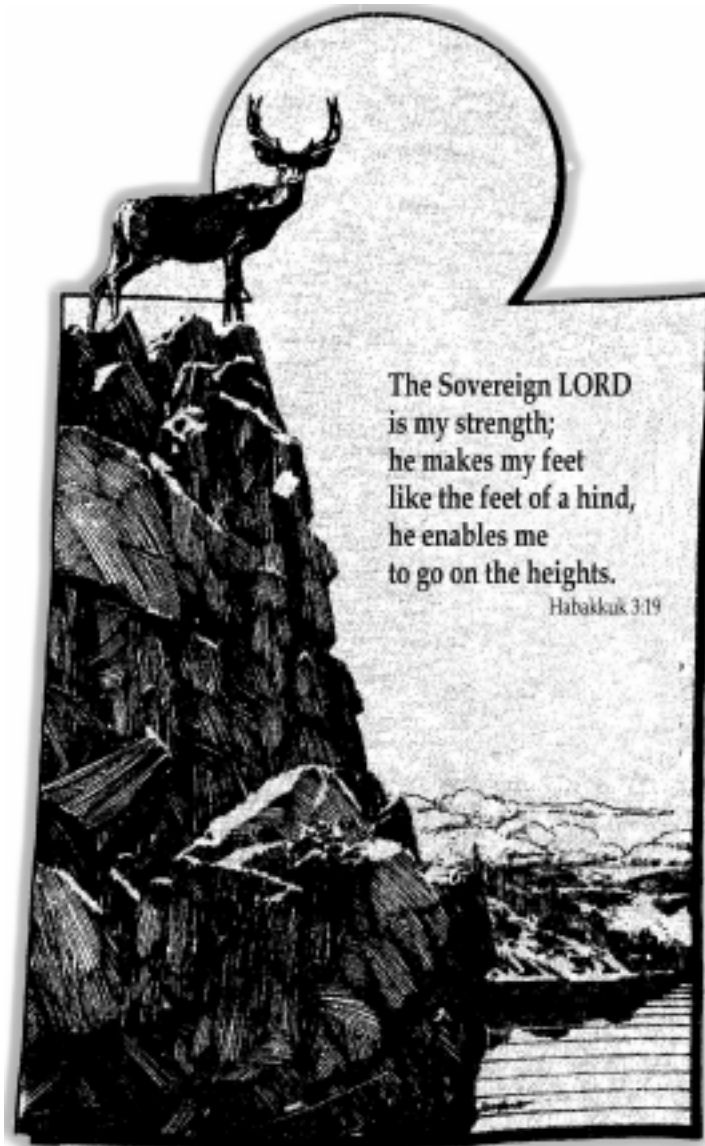


# Going to the High Places

## Chapter 14 The Place of Anointing



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## Introduction

When you reach the conclusion to this chapter you realize that the Shepherd has brought Much-Afraid to the place of anointing “in readiness for burial.” As you journey through these pages you’ll see very clearly this key point:

*A life-giving character quality the Shepherd desires to produce in those of us who follow Him is **complete trust**.*

Your trust in our Lord is inversely proportional to your fear and your need to be in control of your life. Only through complete death to yourself can you abide in complete trust in Jesus.

At the end of this chapter we’ve included a handout entitled **How to Gain a Good Conscience**, a teaching from the Institute in Basic Life Principles that has proven valuable to those who desire to be available for our Father’s purposes. It’s essential that you be clean with both God and with people in your life so you can continue on your journey. A person who lacks a good conscience can “talk Bible”, but a person *with* a good conscience speaks glorifying testimony of our Lord’s personal presence and intervention. We all need to join Paul when he says, “*Indeed, it is because of this that I make a point of always having a clear conscience in the sight of both God and man*” Acts 24:16).

## Chapter 14 The Place of Anointing

### 1. As it happened; 2. However, when Much-Afraid and her companions...

The Path of Forgiveness into the Valley of Loss we covered in the previous chapter is critical to what Much-Afraid is about to experience. Remember what her life was like in the Valley of Humiliation? Do you remember how her family made her a prisoner in her own home and tried to keep her from leaving the valley with the Shepherd?

The Valley of Loss is your appointed time to shed all bitterness and resentment toward everyone who has ever hurt you. If you’ve done this, then you’re able to recognize that

every human being is made in the image of God and is worth the awesome sacrifice of His Son for each one of them, including yourself. The Valley of Loss helps you to see people through the eyes of God, from His heart’s perspective.

The heart of our Father encompasses love that far exceeds human definition. The Hebrew word for “love” is *ahav*. It means a *passionate* love, a wholehearted devotion. The letters themselves mean “a window into the Father’s heart.” This is what He desires for you to perceive so that you can experience life as *He* intends. This is where *real wisdom* emanates from — seeing everything from our Father’s perspective.

Much-Afraid has now come face to face with mountains far higher than the Precipice of Injury that had proved so daunting. Her surroundings weren’t as important, however, as the changes that had been made in her own heart to enable her to pass through the Valley of Loss. Rather than backing off or murmuring in fear, she firmly pressed on toward the high cliffs. To their great joy and surprise, there stood the Shepherd waiting beside a chairlift to the top!

Pause here for a moment to recall your own personal trials in which, in your wildest imagination, you never would have contemplated our Father’s particular intervention that saved the day for you or someone you loved. Once again He was pleased to reveal His Father heart of love to encourage you to keep walking the path He’s set for you.

We’ve waited a long time to get to this point in the book. If you’ve chosen to forgive from your heart all who have hurt or disappointed you, you have access to the grace that’s poured out abundantly by God. While He indeed out of mercy blesses in so many ways the wicked as well as those who walk in Him, people who choose not to get through the Valley of Loss will never experience the intimacy of walking in grateful awareness of His presence.

When we encounter those who are still imprisoned by an unclean conscience toward others, we grieve because they don’t

know what they're missing. When you have a clean conscience the testimonies you're able to share as a result of God's grace ring loud and bold, a far cry from the vicarious secondhand stories repeated by those who have yet to walk in the freedom of a clear conscience.

- Do you have a clear conscience toward God and all others? What is hindering you from humbling yourself to "come clean"?
- We are told in Scripture that "out of the heart the mouth speaks." What has been coming out of your heart lately? Do your words reveal His grace to you, or are there underlying chambers filled with self-justification or blame or excuses?

**3. However, that passed almost at once...; 4. Much-Afraid stepped into one of the seats...**

Total surrender to our Lord is accompanied by amazing grace from Him. Relinquishing all ill feelings toward other people enables you to be completely surrendered to God. You'll find that freedom, grace and surrender are intricately connected as your pilgrimage continues upward.

You begin to acquire a vantage point of understanding people and your past that can never develop until you've passed through the Valley of Loss. You're able to no longer regard people through the flesh of your old nature but through the compassion of the Spirit.

Past hurts, letdowns, and betrayals are recognized as our Father's way of developing Christ-like character in you. When you've left behind the "sting" of those vexing circumstances, you're able to appreciate His "severe mercy" toward you. Painful experiences can be His way of causing you to draw near to Him in the dependent trust of a child. You can then grip the promises of His

Word as an indispensable means of becoming more like Him.

If you decide to resist His means of developing your character, you'll have to face that classroom again. Don't you want in your heart to move along "steadily toward the High Places which had looked impossibly out of reach, supported entirely from above"? *That's* what childlike trust looks like!

- Are you still fighting God about anything? A particular person in your life? Something He wants you to do? Somewhere He wants you to go?
- What will it take for you to completely surrender? What will you have to leave behind?

**5. When at last they stepped out...; 6. Above were peaks of pure white snow...; 7. It was the voice of a mighty waterfall...; 8. As they wandered forward...**

All around us lays evidence of the beauty that must have been Eden. In the Garden, our first parents breathed in the unsullied fragrance of Creation, freely exulting in God's divine splendor.

Much-Afraid had been so fixated on reaching the High Places that she's missed much of His handiwork down in the valley she'd left behind. "Target fixation" can block out all but the goal or thought that's consuming you at the moment. You may believe that your particular target is worth all that focus, such as a home repair project, a work deadline, or finally reaching the end of your to-do list.

But you may also be blinding yourself from the encounters and opportunities that our Shepherd has sent to you for your personal growth and comfort — companions sent by Him for that particular moment. Beware of putting tasks ahead of people!

Sue: Sometimes I get so overwhelmed by

jobs that seem overwhelming, I just need to get out of the house to free up my senses, even if only for a little while. A short hike on the nearby bluffs or along the river does wonders for my senses as I inhale the breezes and marvel at the latest greenery protruding from the rocky landscape.

Even at the border of the Kingdom of Love the diverse display of His extravagant creation overtakes Much-Afraid with wonder. Here eyes are enveloped with bounteous color, her ears swathed in bird calls and rushing water sounds, her lungs replenished with pine-scented air. By yielding to the enchantment all around her, she was able to fully live in the moment in grateful joy.

- When was the last time you stopped long enough to breathe in the splendor of our Lord's creation? Does that concept even appeal to you?
- What is preventing you from immersing yourself for an hour or so in a slice of His outdoor masterwork? What do you purpose to change so you can be refreshed?

**9. At the foot of the cliffs...; 10. As she listened...; 11. "Much-Afraid" said the Shepherd's voice...; 12. She trembled a little...; 13. "It is the leap...; 14. "Look closer," he said again...; 15. Much-Afraid did so...; 16. She gazed and gazed...**

Much-Afraid is keenly aware of the beauty around her. Heightened sensitivity is a blessing from the Holy Spirit to those who take the time to quiet their hearts to listen to Him. But He's calling us to more than appreciation of the beauty in God's creation. He generates an awareness to the *divine encounters* that fit together like a fabric being woven around us.

For instance, Sue and I were just finishing our May-June 2004 newsletter entitled, "*Be Warned! Greasy Grace Fuels the Fires of*

*Hell*". Coincidentally, David Wilkerson's prophetic teaching letter arrived in the mail with the same topic of warning, almost verbatim in places to ours! It encouraged us that the Spirit is issuing the same warning from many venues, and that our Father's timing of confirmation was so perfect.

Yesterday, we received a newsletter from a ministry that uses our writings. We were excited by how much of the relational emphasis they had adapted! An hour later we received a phone call from an older man who wanted to use some of our material to teach on the Hebraic roots of the church. He then asked if we had other information that could deepen his message.

While we were still talking he went to our website, praising God for being able to find the very things for which he'd been searching. He mentioned that he planned to attend a conference being conducted by the very ministry from whom we'd just received the newsletter. God's divine tapestry being woven around us is what we call "God-sightings."

These "eyes wide open" occurrences are like the harmony of all the rivulets that fed into the rushing waterfall. Our Father works so uniquely in each of our lives, yet each testimony of His intervention and grace adds to the torrent of praise that rises up to His throne.

As the Shepherd and Much-Afraid continue to stand by the waterfall, they are captivated by the beauty of that water's abandonment to the will of the Lord: "Always answering the call, to the lowest place of all." This is what we His followers are called to, a call to such abandonment to Him that nothing can stop us as His servants to accomplish His will.

How different is this perspective from the self-serving '**Name it and Claim it**' people who demand that God answer their prayers. When you hear them pray they sound like they are commanding a subordinate to act on their behalf.

Only a heart belief that God *owes* them could motivate their commands that He act on their behalf. Prayer that is couched in

arrogant presumption grieves a Shepherd Who modeled service and death to self on behalf of others.

People who have learned the lesson of abandonment share a humble and glorifying testimony. Can you picture the Shepherd standing next to *you* at the waterfall's base, asking "What do *you* think of this fall of great waters in the abandonment of self-giving?" He presents *His* mind on self-giving in several Gospel passages. His disciples realized they were being trained up to lead, but they needed a heart transformation to follow in Jesus' steps rather than those of the power-flaunting Romans.

Addressing His bickering disciples, Jesus "sat down, summoned the Twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must **make himself last of all and servant of all**'" (Mark 9:35).

Jesus warned them against imitating the tyrant tendencies of Gentile rulers: "But among you, it must not be like that! On the contrary, whoever among you wants to be a leader **must be your servant**" (Mark 10:43).

Abandoning self is not a venue for false humility; rather it's focusing on the One for whom all service is given. "If someone is serving me, let him **follow me**; wherever I am, **my servant will be there too. My Father will honor anyone who serves me**" (John 12:26).

Can you see yourself sitting with Jesus as He delineates what it means to serve others? Think of the most beautiful scene you can imagine in response to Much-Afraid's wonder in the joyous water droplets, "so utterly abandoned to the ecstasy of giving themselves...It looks as though they think it is the loveliest moment in all the world." In a culture in which loving yourself and meeting your own needs take precedence, this idea is truly radical!

Mike: Many years ago at our retreat center, a group of white boys from Cape Cod spent the weekend with us. At the same time, a gathering of older black women from the inner city of Hartford asked to stay in the women's dorm for a couple days of prayer and worship.

The boys and their leader and I went out on the river to go tubing for the day. As I conversed with them I became aware of how racially prejudiced these boys were.

We got back to the center about an hour before supper. As we cleaned up and sat around, the older women took a genuine interest in these boys. Each of these godly women exhibited such a wonderful kind of love that only years of self-abandonment could have produced.

After supper I convinced the youth director to set aside his schedule of planned activities and just let things roll along. Those boys were *changed* by the loving nature of these women who had learned to trust God through all kinds of trials that living in the inner city produces.

The next day as both groups headed back to their own worlds, I saw no less than a few boys hugging the ladies with tears in their youthful eyes.

- Is it in your nature to abandon yourself (your needs, desires, ambitions, time) in order to give yourself to others?
- What kind of attitude shift needs to be made in your heart so that you can serve with the joy of the water droplets rather than with the resignation of a "martyr"?

**17. "Yes," answered the Shepherd...; 18. Again Much-Afraid looked...; 19. Laughing and shouting at the top of their voices...; 20. At first sight perhaps the leap does look terrible...**

The theme of exuberant joy continues, even when obstacles that might "dismay" the rushing waters gives them cause to "swirl triumphantly around and over the rocks."

Mike: I can identify with the phrase, "the next glorious crisis of their self-giving" in a unique way. Have you ever done a "trust fall" into the arms of other people? Let me

tell you about my first two falls. During one women's retreat as they were doing trust falls off our 5-foot high log, they asked if they could catch me, a 200-plus pound man. For several years I'd been conducting retreats incorporating our outdoor confidence course, but I'd conveniently avoided having to fall into the arms of anyone!

Yielding to their pleas, I clambered up onto the log. Now, these ladies didn't calculate that a man is heavier in his shoulders while women are heavier in the stern. I leaned back and fell right through their outstretched arms, smashing painfully into the packed dirt. It hurt but nothing was broken.

The following weekend a youth retreat asked me to join them in trust falls. This time I put the stronger guys into position to catch my upper torso. I fell safely and painlessly into their arms. But to "fall with abandonment" took a lot more courage the second time than it did the first!

A wonderful fellowship is shared by those who have learned the abandonment of the waterfall experience together. Concerns and worries don't even enter into their decisions. Like Much-Afraid they regard "every obstacle...as another object to be overcome and another lovely opportunity..."

That kind of opportunistic view of life leaves no room for hesitation or shrinking back in light of the unspeakable joy and glory of seeing God's grace operate around you. **"Self-giving is life."** As the waterfall teaches, "obstacles only add to the joy and glory of the movement."

Keep in mind:

*You can never appreciate what the abandonment of complete trust in our Lord feels like until you are faced with the opportunity to doubt.* The joy of complete trust comes when you're confronted with a circumstance that could tempt you to forget His faithfulness — but you choose to walk in trust anyway.

If you can clearly identify with the exuberant abandonment of the water, keep pressing on with us. If you *can't* identify, **stop**. Turn to *How to Gain a Good Conscience* at the end before proceeding on with the rest of the

chapter. That will make all the difference as you finish your "anointing for burial."

- Are you a person who is abandoned to God's will? If not, what is hindering you? If yes, how do you find ways to glorify our Lord through testimony?
- Describe a situation in which you were called to give of yourself beyond that which you thought you could do. How did it turn out?

**21. On hearing these words...; 22. It was not, however, that the sun always shone...**

What a delightful part of the journey for Much-Afraid, spending precious days with the Shepherd as He walked and talked with her and her companions! Just think about the "many things about the Kingdom" that He shared with them, whetting their spiritual appetites for what lay ahead.

Did you as a child ever experience that delicious anticipation that accompanies a long-awaited trip or activity? It seemed as though that day would never arrive — yet at the same time, your fantasy thoughts of what it was going to be like kept you entertained for hours!

But note that even during this exquisite time for Much-Afraid, clouds and mist showed up to block the view of gleaming peaks. That, too, was an essential ingredient to the journey, for the Shepherd exhorted them all to be of good courage as those who walk by trust, not by sight. See (2 Corinthians 5:7.)

The apostle Peter assures us that we must keep pressing on in loving and trusting our Lord even though we've not been privileged to see him face to face as he had. Our trust needs to be exercised to stand firm even when we don't see obvious evidence of His intervention in our lives. His Spirit is faithfully present in tumult as well as in peace.

- Think about the ups and downs of your life. How easy is it for you to recall sunlit times of joy when clouds of turmoil are swirling around you?
- If you had the opportunity to spend an hour hearing from the heart of Jesus, what would you want Him to focus on?

**23. Every now and again...; 24. On one such occasion the Shepherd...; 25. Believe steadfastly in what you have seen...**

When God showed us that we were to go to Israel for three months in 1993, we didn't even have money for airfare. But at the last hour in which we could purchase tickets, an unexpected gift arrived to cover the cost. We had no savings and, when we returned to the States, we had to trust on God's provision as needs arose. *Jehovah Jireh*, God our Provider, became much more than a name to us; it became our way of life.

While we lived in Israel, our Lord would encourage us by having us find shekels on the sidewalks and streets. Discovering these shiny dime-size coins filled us with childlike delight because we know Who had caused them to be found!

During the past 10 years we've continued to find coins (and even bills!) to confirm His faithful provision as we walk in obedient trust. On occasions in which He's directed us to do something out of the ordinary, He's heartened us with coins which turn up in the most unusual places. Time and again our Father has assured us that resources would be there when needed.

We included the poem "Step By Step" in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study guide. If you seek even *one* step and are willing to take that step, you'll never find God's guidance lacking. Just keep in mind that He is never obligated to explain *why* He's revealing to you that particular word. Nor should you dig a pit for yourself by conjecturing where

you think He's leading.

Mike: Sue and I packed up our belongings in a U-Haul 4 years ago expecting that we were heading for a mission school near Phoenix, Arizona. During a conference there a few weeks earlier, the director had invited us to move to the mission compound to share with the staff the Hebraic foundations of following Jesus.

Just as we closed up the back of the truck, we received a call from the director. He sadly reported that some of the missionaries had invoked a little-known clause in their charter to overrule his desire for us to come. He quoted them as saying, "Mike and Sue insist that you can't minister to people you don't love. We don't even *like* these Indians, but we "do right" by them. We don't want that couple coming here."

The director paused a moment then shared an important piece of information. He sensed that God was *protecting* us by keeping us away from the bitterness and squabbling that had plagued the staff for years. In fact, he and his wife were themselves resigning in order to live among one of the tribes to teach them the Hebraic foundations.

Since we had friends we were going to visit along the way in Memphis, we decided to head west anyway. I asked God to not let us cross the Mississippi without knowing where we were going. Several friends had been praying for us. When we arrived in Memphis we received three phone calls. Each one reported that God had revealed that He wanted us in Flagstaff, Arizona.

We drove into town knowing no one. In time, though, we began to work among different Native people. Each one told us that if we'd gone to that mission that's so hated by so many Indians, no Native person would have listened to us. God *did* protect us!

We want to encourage you with the Shepherd's words, "Always go forward along the path of obedience as far as you know until I intervene, even if it seems to be leading you where you fear I could never mean you to go."

- When is the last time you sought our Lord for guidance? Did you wait for Him to give it, or did you pray-and-go, hoping for the best? Did you obey what He revealed to you?
- Do you have a testimony like that of our coins by which our Lord encourages you? What are the different ways in which He's directed your path?

**26. "Remember, Much-Afraid, what you have seen" ...; 27. Before the curtain closed again...; 28. On the last day they stayed there...; 29. Up there on the mountain-top...; 30. Putting out his hand...**

When you've recognized a God-sighting in your life, you need to remember it so that you can recount it later. Some people keep journals so that they won't forget the details. Much-Afraid picked some gentians so that she could recount the reality of what occurred here at the place of anointing before the clouds would cover the peaks again.

In the 10+ years we've been sharing the Hebraic foundations, many people who once seemed delighted turned back again to their old ways. Unresolved bitterness most often was the culprit that defiled our relationship. Sometimes the pain of losing people we deeply care about can bring about deep despair. It's at these times that we recall our stay in Israel where our Lord showed us the relational priorities of the earliest Church.

Mike: Sometimes I refresh my determination to press on by remembering how Sue and I went away to an ancient monastery on retreat during our last weeks in the Land. We'd gone there to enjoy the quiet and to confirm with our Lord what He had shown us. I remember how I'd wandered about the grounds while Sue rested. I had entered a little chapel, finding

a plain wooden table with a small bowl of olive oil on it. The Holy Spirit directed me to anoint different parts of my body to set them apart for His use: my eyes, ears, mouth, heart, hands, feet. Everything I looked at, heard, spoke, felt, did, and wherever I went, were to be set apart for Him. Then He said, "Get your wife and do the same."

I remember the next morning as we stood in the cold darkness waiting for the sun to rise over the Judean hills. As it emerged at our backs, it cast a golden glow on the field below us. Yet, a massive tree in the middle of the field remained starkly black. Later, God revealed to us the meaning of that sign: Our ministry in the US would be like that of Moses with the Israelites. Circumstances would initially become rougher for those who embraced the facets that made the earliest Church intimate and powerful. If and as they persevered, they would be strengthened in their spirit as they prepared for His use of them.

I remember asking our Father how I would provide for Sue and me when we returned to the States. He answered, "*Share this message, and I will provide for you.*" Wanting to be sure that it was Him and not my imagination, I asked Him for a sign — that we'd receive a check in the mail from the US that day.

That afternoon when we returned to our host's home, there was a letter waiting for us. Seven days previously the Holy Spirit had urged the sender to leave work early and go home. A letter which we'd mailed a week earlier to many old friends had just arrived. Responding to the Spirit's nudge, he immediately sent a check for \$100 and mailed it to us. That check arrived at the precise time our Father knew would fan our trust flames with joyful determination!

Reminding ourselves of the miraculous God's sightings from our past is a great means to fend off despair. Plus, you're stirred once again to thank the One in Whose hands your life is lovingly held!

- Why not take a moment and see if you can list 5 God-sightings in your own life.
- How would your parents or grandparents evaluate your life? If they're alive, have you asked them lately?
- Does recounting that which our Lord has done for you come easily? Explain...
- Have you ever asked your parents or grandparents for input as to changes they think you should make in your life? What would prevent you from asking?

**31. All around her, in every direction...;**

**32. In the heart of each flower...**

The white-robed hosts of flowers permeated the air with their fragrant joy. What a glorious picture of those in Jesus who have passed from this world to the ecstasy of His presence! We're told in Hebrews 12:1 that we are surrounded by a great cloud of faithful followers of Jesus who have faithfully run the life race set before them and crossed the line into heaven.

Mike: I like to think that both sets of our parents are looking down on us as part of that "great cloud of witnesses." Do they find joy in how our Lord has been changing us over the long haul? Are they filled with delight to see us living for Jesus? Would they be proud of us if their lives here on earth had been extended?

I can still recall as though it were yesterday the afternoon we arrived at my Dad's house in August, 1978. Sue and I had both come to Christ in 1977, and I'd just left a 10 year career in the Navy. We were on our way to seminary in Massachusetts and had stopped by to stay with my folks for a few days.

I was hardly out of the car when Dad asked me to join him in the back yard. Looking me in the eye Dad asked, "Are you doing all this for Jesus and no one else?" My emphatic "Yes!!!" was met with a warm smile and his promise that he'd stand with my decision. The rest of my family couldn't understand our determination to follow Jesus. It frightened them. As years passed, however, not only our parents but other family members put their trust in the Lord Who promises to change lives!

**33. On the utmost pinnacle...; 34. Then the King told her to kneel...; 35. It seemed to her that a burning flame...; 36. When she recovered...**

We sometimes tend to forget the awesomeness of the God Who love us. The same Lord Who tenderly comforts us and graciously forgives us is also the LORD of Lords Who rules with "*utmost authority and power.*"

Before he could walk the path God has assigned him, the prophet Isaiah underwent the same commissioning cleansing that Much-Afraid endured. Her lips were seared by a burning coal plucked off a holy altar with golden tongues.

Do you understand the distinctiveness of that altar? Our Father doesn't *casually* purge our lives of sin. His plans for your life are too weighty for you to nonchalantly continue with a self-centered focus. Those golden tongues that grip *your* particular cleansing coal are lovingly wielded by One Who fully understands the pain that purging involves. That's why the process is beautiful in its purpose but terrible in its pain.

When you choose in obedient trust to walk through that trial knowing in your heart that the Shepherd's arms are carrying you, your yieldedness brings about a deeper dependence in *His* strength rather than your own.

Sue: I find that more often than not, the purging our Lord generally uses on me is through oral rebuke, correction or admonishment. Like Eve, I can be too quick to act independent of my husband's counsel or

input, and bring discord into our marriage through my own foolish willfulness. Then our Father uses Mike to impress on me what my attitudes and actions have done to diminish the peace in our home.

Do I *enjoy* being brought up short? No, but I do realize that resisting His words via Mike in favor of wanting to hear “in my spirit from Jesus” misses the character transformation that our Lord is working. I (and probably many other wives!) need to see in my husband the servant-leader He has chosen him to be.

- Are you more prone to focus on the “Abba” aspect of our Lord rather than on His awesome Kingship? What could be the danger of over-emphasizing one reality of His character rather than the complete package?
- Who in your life does our Father most often use as His mouthpiece of correction or admonishment? How do you generally respond to this messenger?

**37. When he found that she was sufficiently recovered...; 38. “Much-Afraid,” the Shepherd said...**

Following her purging experience, Much-Afraid’s sensitivity was heightened. The song bird’s repeated chorus sounded like, “He’s gotten the victory, Hurrah!” We shouldn’t be surprised that our Lord uses elements of His creation to convey messages to His children. We’ve noticed that many Native Americans are much more sensitive than Europeans to God’s use of His handiwork to communicate something of Himself.

Mike: For Sue and me, sunsets are a spectacular sign of His favor on memorable days in our lives. After we finished a Marriage Encounter weekend in Santa Barbara in 1974, a weekend that wonderfully changed our lives together, we were driving back along the Pacific coast in the early evening.

Not only the sky but even the sea was cray-on red from the setting sun’s brilliant rays.

A few years later we were returning to our motel in the Philippines after being baptized in a New Tribes Mission village. The evening sky was filled with a magenta we’d never seen before. It was so *unnatural* that it was *supernatural*!

And when we moved into our mobile home a year ago, a double rainbow gleamed above us, confirming with His indwelling Spirit that His plan for this move was being fulfilled. We *thrill* to see God in His creation, and we delight in telling others about these colorful touches of His hand.

- What “natural wonders” from our Father’s hands rouse your heart the most?

**39. Then with wonderful tenderness...; 40. It was then that Much-Afraid...; 41. He said very gently...; 42. So they stood in the mist-filled wood...**

At last Much-Afraid hears the words she’s yearned for: the last part of the journey was about to begin! She’s been given a glimpse of the Kingdom, and trembles with hope that soon she will leap among its High Places.

But have you noticed that “soon” in our Lord’s vocabulary and “soon” in ours don’t often coincide? We like to think in *immediate* terms while our Father’s plans involve a wider purpose. To each of us He whispers, “The time is not long now.” Yet in the same breath we’re reminded to “hold fast” and “overcome.” It’s definitely not an easy slide into eternity!

The Shepherd speaks to Much-Afraid the very words that have inspired us so often: “*I know what you are doing. Look, I have put in front of you **an open door**, and no one can shut it.*” Our Lord *knows* what He’s called you to do. His own hand has personally designed a plan with *your name* on it. The doorway to fulfilling that plan stands open — He’s not hiding it from you! And

no one can thwart that purpose by shutting the door. However, you must choose to cross the threshold one step at a time.

Your strength comes not only from your willingness but from your obedient trust — “You have kept My word.” And, as the Shepherd states, He regards your yield-*edness* to His *right and authority* as Lord to do with you as He will: “You have not denied *My name*.”

I wish Sue and I could say that in the years we’ve served our Lord, sacrificial love was always our primary motivation. But that wouldn’t be true! Many times we’ve been beaten down by demonic forces and by the betrayal of bitter people. Sometimes it was all we could do to “obey”, and “not disown” our Lord. It’s embarrassing to us that we couldn’t have been more noble in purpose during those times. But our Lord’s words, “yet you have obeyed...”, is to us His gentle hand lifting up our bowed heads.

As we near the end of this chapter, we want to encourage you, “KEEP MOVING FORWARD!” God’s promises are never *behind* you, they’re always *ahead* of you. You may be going through times of purification for the explicit purpose to be *nobly used* during the days of chastisement that are coming upon this land.

God is doing this for your good, and for His future use of you. Don’t get hung up on feelings that you have failed Him. That is Hellenism at its core. Our God brings *course corrections* in the sails of our lives to turn us back to His way of living. “KEEP MOVING FORWARD!”

- Are you someone who is known to “keep on keeping on” with our Lord no matter what the circumstances? Be honest.
- What hinders you from keeping on?

**43. A little later they were down...; 44. He answered her very quietly...; 45. Much-Afraid did not hear these words...**

The anointing that Much-Afraid has experienced in this chapter has prepared Much-Afraid for her soon-coming burial. Isn’t the real *burial* that leads to life found while we are still alive? That’s what Jesus assures each of us in the following passages.

*“He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has **lost his life for My sake** will find it”* (Matthew 10:39).

*“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever **loses his life for My sake** will find it”* (Matthew 16:25).

*“And everyone **who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake**, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life”* (Matthew 19:29).

*“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s** will save it”* (Mark 8:35).

None of us can truly be alive and free in Jesus until we are dead to everything we once were. That includes family and anyone and anything else we hold dear. Yet this can only be accomplished through His grace. God’s grace is something you *know* without doubt that you’ve received. Through His grace comes complete recognition and worship of Him.

- What has been the most painful or costliest “death to self” for Jesus’ sake you’ve yet endured?
- How would you articulate to others the way in which God’s grace carried you through that “death”?

# HOW TO GAIN A GOOD CONSCIENCE

[from the Institute in Basic Life Principles Seminar]

## WHAT IS A GOOD CONSCIENCE?

A good conscience is a healthy conscience. It is one that is cleared of offenses toward God and toward man. 1Timothy 1:5: *“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”* The goal of a good conscience is summarized in the Greek word, aproskopos, which is translated, “void of offense.” Acts 24:16: *“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear (void of offense) before God and man.”*

The term means having nothing for one to strike against and not causing to stumble. It denotes a smooth road and metaphorically not leading others into sin by one’s mode of life. It is a conscience which is not troubled or distressed by the guilt of offenses.

A good conscience is not stained with guilt toward God; it is blameless and innocent. Because of our sin nature, the qualities of a good conscience are only possible as we have our hearts cleansed by the blood of Christ. Any works on our own behalf toward God would not gain for us a good conscience. Hebrews 9:14: *“...the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”*

A good conscience is one that allows me to look every person in the eye knowing that not one of them can point a finger and say, “You wronged me and you never tried to make it right.”

## WHAT DOES A GOOD CONSCIENCE INVOLVE?

### **Every Thought**

2 Corinthians 10:5: *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

### **Every Word**

Matthew 12:36: *“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.”*

### **Every Deed**

2 Corinthians 5:10: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

### **Every Motive**

Jeremiah 17:9-10: *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*

**HOW DOES GRACE RELATE TO A GOOD CONSCIENCE?**

Grace is not some static quality; it is a dynamic force from God which gives us the desire and power to do His will. As you humble yourself in preparing to ask for forgiveness, God will give you grace. This grace will give you the desire and the power to ask for forgiveness which will bring further humbling and further grace. The more grace you receive, the more power you will have to live as Jesus intends for you.

**STEPS TO GAIN A GOOD CONSCIENCE**

Introspection is not the way to gain a good conscience. Through introspection we measure ourselves by what we think is right or wrong. In the course of reading Scripture and living the Christian life, the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind offenses which need to be cleared up. When these come to your remembrance, you are then to take the steps to restore a good conscience.

God may bring to mind offenses that you have committed against any of the following:  
 God  Your father  Your mother  Your child(ren)  Your stepfather  Your step-mother  Your brother(s)  Your sister(s)  Your relative(s)  Your spouse  Your pastor(s)  Your teacher(s)  Your neighbor(s)  Your friend(s)  Your employer(s)  Store owner(s)

**LIST YOUR OFFENSES**

It is easy to minimize our offenses, and, at the same time, blame others or justify what we did. Therefore, it would be very wise to begin this next step by asking God to revive our memory. Psalm 139:23-24: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

**WHAT DID YOU DO THAT CAUSED OTHERS TO BE OFFENDED BY YOU?**

Did you speak words which were:	List Actions which were:
Critical_____	Careless_____
Judgmental_____	Dishonest_____
Slanderous_____	Improper_____
Untruthful_____	Sensual_____
Harsh_____	Disrespectful_____
Disruptive_____	Slothful_____
Vulgar_____	Destructive_____
Profane_____	Wasteful_____
Contentious_____	Disobedient_____
Indiscreet_____	Forgetful_____

**WHAT ATTITUDES CAUSED YOUR WRONG WORDS OR ACTIONS?**

The key to asking forgiveness properly is identifying the wrong attitudes before naming the wrong words or actions. There are two essential reasons why wrong attitudes must be confessed before wrong actions. The first reason is that wrong attitudes are usually more hurtful and offensive than wrong words or actions. The second reason is that if the offending attitude is not corrected, the person who is being asked for forgiveness is instinctively aware that the same offenses will probably be repeated.

List attitudes which were:

Proud_____	Unreliable_____
Deceptive_____	Disloyal_____
Willful_____	Unconcerned_____
Presumptuous_____	Insensitive_____
Selfish_____	Angry_____
Ungrateful_____	Bitter_____

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING OUT RESTITUTION**

One of the clearest evidences of genuine repentance is the willingness to make right any damage suffered by the one whom you wronged. If you stole items, they must be returned. If you cannot return them, you should pay for them. If you do not have the money to pay for them, at least one alternative plan should be offered to the person from whom you ask forgiveness.

### **PURPOSE TO ASK FORGIVENESS**

God is the One Whom we have offended the most. If we fail to understand this fact and to act upon it, God's blessing will be missing from our lives when we go to ask forgiveness of others.

Stop and Pray: "O Lord, I have sinned against You. I now confess my sin of \_\_\_\_\_. I thank You for Your forgiveness and cleansing me from this sin through the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ."

### **SEPARATE GUILT FROM BLAME**

One of the greatest hindrances you may experience in asking forgiveness is the feeling that the one you wronged was also guilty. You may even feel that he or she deserved what you did. It will be your tendency to magnify the blame which you have toward the one you offended, just as it will be his or her tendency to magnify the blame toward you.

Mixing guilt and blame will not only stop you from gaining a good conscience, it will also cause these two spiritual poisons to eat away at your soul and to reduce the spiritual potential which God has for your life.

### **CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORDING**

The importance of selecting the right words for your confession cannot be overemphasized. The prodigal son carefully chose each word. Luke 15:18-19: "*I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.*"

The words which you choose should focus only on *your* part of the offense.

Suggested wording:

"God has helped me to realize that I was wrong in (root attitudes and resulting offenses). Would you forgive me?"

### **Evaluating the wording:**

- It is concise and to the point. The longer a confession, the more danger there is for self-justification.
- It does not blame by implying, “I was wrong, but you were too.”
- It does not communicate pride by statements like “If I was wrong...”
- It does not offer excuses such as “I got angry because I was tired.”
- It does not suggest flippancy by such words as “I’m sorry.”
- It does not demand forgiveness, but instead pleads for it.
- It requires a direct answer rather than a general response.
- It calls for a verbal response.
- It identifies the basic offense.

### **DETERMINE WHETHER A PHONE CALL OR A VISIT IS BEST**

The natural tendency at this point is to simply write a letter in which you ask forgiveness. The appeal of this wrong method is that it avoids any personal confrontation. However, the lack of personal contact also eliminates the possibility of gaining one of the most important benefits—verbal assurance that you are forgiven.

### **SELECT THE BEST TIME TO ASK FORGIVENESS**

The closer you come to approaching the person you offended, the more difficult it will probably become to ask forgiveness. Some common rationalizations that appear at this time are, “It happened so long ago.”; “Things have gotten better between us.”

### **HOW DOES THE PRODIGAL SON REVEAL SPECIAL INSIGHTS INTO HAVING A GOOD CONSCIENCE?**

Christ’s parable about the prodigal son contains rich insights about the real essence of repentance:

- Repentance begins by “*coming to our senses.*”  
Luke 15:17: “*When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’*”
- Repentance is admitting that “I have sinned.”  
Luke 15:18: “*I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*”
- Repentance recognizes personal unworthiness.  
Luke 15:19: “*I am no longer worthy to be called your son;*
- Repentance accepts new limitations.  
Luke 15:19: “*....make me like one of your hired men.*”

**GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET**

<b>• WHOM DID I OFFEND?</b>					
<b>• HOW DID I OFFEND?/ WRONG ATTITUDES?</b>					
<b>• HOW CAN I RESTORE?</b>					
<b>• WHAT SHOULD I SAY IN ASKING FORGIVENESS?</b>					
<b>• SHOULD I VISIT/PHONE?</b>					
<b>• WHEN WILL I DO IT?</b>					