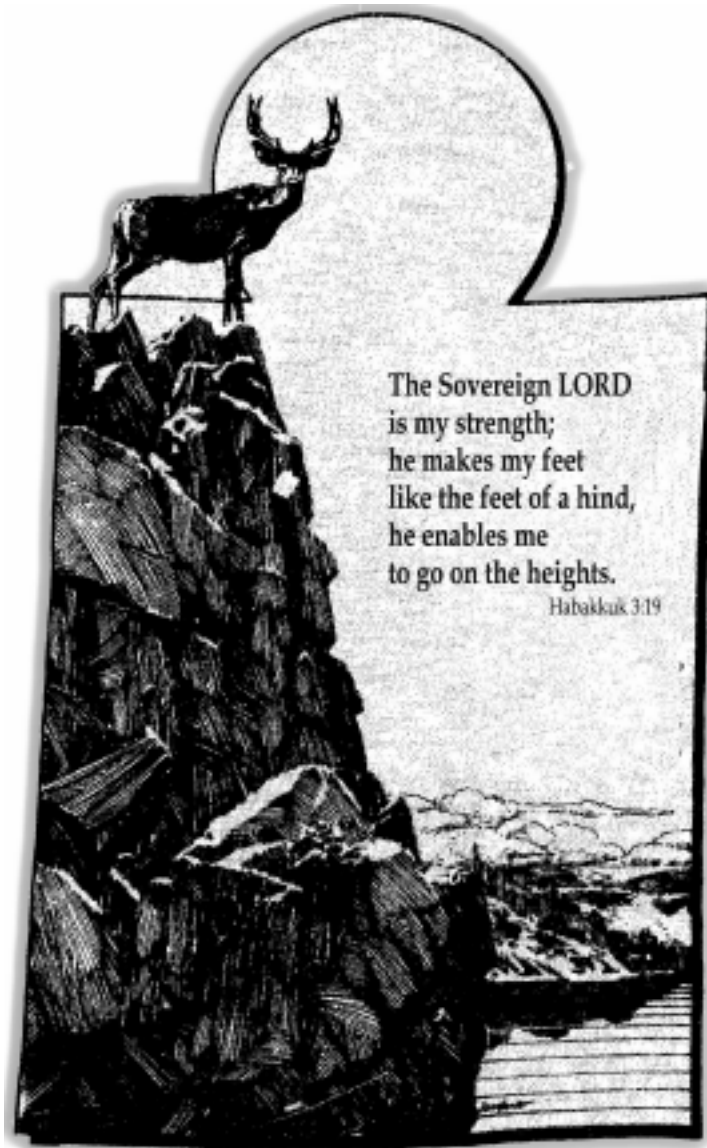


# Going to the High Places

## Chapter 16 Grave on the Mountains



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## Introduction

We come to the point in our journey in which *hope* is key. Hope is the essence of that which you haven't yet seen come to pass, but still trust that it will because of the One Who brings it about!

Much-Afraid must confront the fact that the wonderful promises of the Shepherd have not yet been fulfilled. She has not reached the High Places, her feet still stumble at times, and her heart is still tangled with the very natural desire for human love to be reciprocated.

Yet she has set her heart like flint to “do that which He had told her, simply because He asked it of her.” What a model of loving, obedient trust! Her only strength lies in the unchangeable faithfulness of our Lord. No matter how indiscernible the outcome may be, she's determined to follow where He leads. As the prophet Hosea assures those who are pressing onward, “***The ways of the Lord are straight, and the righteous walk in them, but in them sinners stumble*** (14:9b).

## Chapter 16 Grave on the Mountains

### 1. The path led forward...

The gaping gorge was indeed the place which had been appointed for Much-Afraid. If ever she might have doubted the Shepherd's will, this impassible chasm would have been it.

Picture yourself teetering at the edge of a mist-filled abyss, so clouded that you can't even make out the other side, and so deep that all you hear is the voice of mighty, swirling waters below. There's no safety net at the bottom, either!

Much-Afraid has grown greatly in her trust of the Shepherd, though. She doesn't have to understand or even question His intended path for her and her companions. It's that *pattern* of ongoing obedience that has taught her to wholly yield to His will. One step of faith has become enough for her faith to see — and to obey.

Has our Shepherd ever led you to a seemingly insurmountable chasm across which lies no secure bridge of prior experience to which you can cling?

We've stood a number of times at the very edge of the majestic Grand Canyon, peering into the plunging rocky depths. A certain slightly queasy churning warns me when I get too close to the brink — the next step is thousand feet down! The Canyon is huge to the point of surreal, like a canvas on which its Creator has exuberantly splashed images of rock and horizon. The mighty Colorado River at the bottom seems a rambling ribbon encompassed by towering walls.

Much-Afraid's intent gaze reveals no such detailed shape or color to give it perspective. No trails beckon her to pick her way carefully down. All that she's aware of is dense mist hovering over a gravelike gorge.

- Describe the highest point from which you've stood gazing downward. How did it feel to be able to see so far down and so far across?

- What life experience could you compare to Much-Afraid's dead end in which she knows she can't turn back or skirt around?

### 2. Looking at her companions...; 3. Then for the last time...

Don't you feel proud of Much-Afraid that it never even crossed her mind to turn back, even in the face of such a terrible unknown? That willingness to totally surrender herself in compliance with the Shepherd's plan shows just how far she — and hopefully we — have come in our journey together to the High Places.

She doesn't even grumble that the designated path of obedience is *downward*, not up

to the heights. What she does encounter, however, is the calm confirmation of her companions that she must jump. And, she's not alone. Her companions are eager to receive her extended hands so that they too might complete their Shepherd's assignment.

Such precious companionship is key to your inner resolve when you face a situation as life-altering as this one! Sue: Not long after Mike and I returned from our own epiphany in Israel, we were both overtaken with dreams of a mountain — at the same time! Mike's dream found him standing on Mount Horeb, the "mountain of desolation" in the Older Testament. Our Lord told him, "I brought you to this place to *desolate* you. I've used the past few years to purge you of that which isn't like Me for My intended use for you. Now wake up your wife and tell her."

Mike gently shook me awake just as I was ending a dream. I'd been standing on a mountain plateau shaped like a half-moon that stretched out into ever-brightening light. My back was to the dark, flat edge. I knew without looking that the blackness behind me was studded with jagged rocks and fell steeply downward.

The Spirit made clear that that darkness was my past, and that destruction lay in my life if I tried to recapture anything of that past. Then I heard in my spirit, "You may look from side to side to see who is traveling with you, but you must keep pressing on into the light."

As Mike excitedly shared his dream, I repeated mine. We both recognized that we were being prepared for service in an arena we'd never before trod.

- Who are the key companions our Lord has brought to come alongside you to encourage and exhort you to press on to the High Places?
- If you feel as though you're all alone at the moment, are you willing to ask our Father to

give you His perspective on the people you already know? Perhaps He's placed a "companion in the rough" in your life to foster a deeper relationship with Him. Don't discount neighbors, co-workers or even casual acquaintances whom He might be preparing to be woven into your life tapestry!

#### **4. The place into which they had thrown themselves...**

If you are to participate in the sufferings of Jesus in order to share in His glory (see Romans 8:17), you're going to be called to obedience in which your dreams and plans are "bruised and shaken". Fear of potential pain and injury could have paralyzed Much-Afraid into inaction. She could have refused to leave her perch of relative safety.

But total yieldedness of heart demands that we let go of any fears or even preferences that could hinder our confidence that "*underneath are the everlasting arms*" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Much-Afraid wasn't so foolish as to presuppose that she'd float down like a feather into the gorge or glide gracefully like an eagle, thereby escaping pain. No, her obedience was prompted by her trust in the faithfulness of her Shepherd. If He said that she needed to jump into a misty pit, then He had a purpose greater than her need to understand beforehand.

As they felt their way along the canyon floor, the three happened upon a large flat altar. This was quite unlike the pebbly altars upon which Much-Afraid had received her memorial stones of promise. Yet she had learned the significance of altars and was already *prepared in her heart* to obey.

- Have you ever taken a "leap of faith" into the unknown in obedience to the Spirit's prompting?

- How did you respond when you discovered that your obedience yielded an outcome far different from what you had anticipated? Was your determination to continue to trust strengthened or weakened by your experience?

**5. “This is the place”...; 6. But for the first time on all that journey...; 7. She knelt there quite alone...; 8. It seemed that in a way Bitterness had been right...**

Much-Afraid now encounters a unique situation in her relationship with the Shepherd: *silence* in response to her prayer. This is a defining point for her. Will she panic? doubt? faint? Will her trust falter in this new refining fire?

We’ve both had times during our journey in which it seemed as though the heavens were indeed brass. Our spirits felt utterly alone. You’ve probably passed through a few seasons like this too!

But that’s precisely the time in which we must draw on our trust that He never fails His Word. Even if my eyes see no evidence of Him at work in my life, and my ears hear no encouraging word that this too will pass, my confidence must rest in HIS faithfulness and trustworthiness. He has promised to never forsake me, and I must choose to either lay claim to that reality or suffer the pain of doubting Him.

Your imagination can be a fertile playground for Satan to insinuate painful images. If you’re not diligent to capture those thoughts, you’ll *wall off* the very people who need your love — usually the ones most capable of hurting you! You can see how quickly doubt can explode into fear, and fear can escalate into emotional isolation. Don’t let that happen!

If you allow doubt to nip at your trust, other unbidden thoughts will fill in the void where hope should be. Because Much-Afraid had already set her heart on trusting the Shepherd, even the memory of Bitterness’s

words of woeful warning had no emotional impact. The *words* he’d snarled had pretty well come to pass, but their verity had *no power to bring her down*. Only one thing mattered to Much-Afraid: “to do the will of the one she followed and loved, no matter what it involved or cost.”

And isn’t that what He’s asking of *you*?

- What is the worst scenario you could imagine might happen to you? Can you walk in Much-Afraid’s steps of trust that nothing else matters than doing the will of the One you love and follow?
- What period stands out in your life journey when you cried out to Jesus but sensed no response? How did you react when that happened?

**9. The grave up on the mountains...**

What gentle peace invades your heart when you have abandoned yourself to the utter sovereignty of the Shepherd! All striving ceases, all the past flagellation of self-pity and resentment and pride are extinguished.

This is the path of acceptance walked by so many of our persecuted brothers and sisters worldwide. They know deeply the companionship spoken of by the exiled apostle John, a “*fellow-sharer in the suffering and the kingship and the perseverance that come from being united with Jesus*” (Revelation 1:9).

Heaven’s perceived silence leads us to an interesting point. How does the nature of your prayers change as you grow in understanding of His faithfulness, even when you know that “no Angel will call from heaven to say that [your] sacrifice need not be made”?

Jesus exhorted His disciples to keep on praying, as did the apostle Paul with the Thessalonian believers. In light of *His faithfulness*, your desperation factor can diminish or even disintegrate completely.

Mike: Sue and I have experienced our Father's response to our cry immediately at times, and later at others. Many petitions and requests are still pending! But the One Who is well able to answer is also worthy to decide *when and how* He will respond. That's His prerogative as Lord!

As you've probably noticed in David's psalms in particular, our communication with our God can encompass a full range of emotions. He created us to experience these and knows our weaknesses and frailties. He won't turn you away from bringing before Him that which He already knows is going on in your heart. Just remember that the other frail human beings He's set in your midst aren't as understanding as He is. They can't read your mind to determine if *they're* at fault, or if you are just going through a tough time yourself. Exercise the *self-control* the Spirit offers so others don't have to be apprehensive around you!

Sue: Some of my deepest disappointments have come when I've prayed *answers* instead of requests and petitions! In other words, I've been so specific in what I thought God needed to do that I boxed out His creativity and blinded myself to the unique way in which He *was* intervening!

The testimony of a dear brother can help clarify the difference between praying for needs rather than specifying answers. "I was anxious and worried because my car had broken down and I had no way to get to work. So I asked Mike and Sue to pray with me for another car. To my dismay, they refused! But then they explained that my real need was for *transportation*, so that's what they prayed for with me.

"The next day I happened to mention my need to a co-worker, and his face lit up! He lived one exit up from my apartment complex and said he'd be glad to pick me up and drop me off. Those times during our daily 45-minute commute were incredible! I led him to Jesus, and we spent the drive time praying and singing and learning from the Bible on tape.

"I started to feel a little guilty about

inconveniencing him, but then his wife called me. She told me how delighted she and the kids were with the changes she was seeing in her husband. SHE didn't want the fellowship to stop! So our Lord answered the need in such a way that my earlier prayer about getting another car seems so shortsighted now."

Praying a need isn't a fatalistic "whatever will be, will be" approach. Even the blind man who trustingly approached Jesus expressed his *need*: "I want to see!" He didn't presume to tell Jesus how to do it. He just trusted that however the Master chose to meet the need would be sufficient.

Our Shepherd's provision surpasses all that we could think or ask. We just need the spiritual eyes to see the matter from His perspective and to wait on Him to reveal His response.

- Are you one who prays specific answers rather than offering our Father your need?
- Are you willing to offer up your "prayers, and petitions with thanksgiving" (Philippians 4:6) with a confident peace that you are being heard? Do you have a hopeful expectation that His timing and intervention will far exceed your heart's desire because it is *suiting* His purposes?

**10. She felt nothing but a great stillness...;**

**11. After she had waited for a little...**

Form in your mind's eye an image of "the flame of concentrated desire to do his will." Mike: One morning in prayer our Lord gave me a picture of a funnel to illustrate progress into the center of His will. Alongside the sides of the funnel are our human desires and the obstacles and strongholds, like cliff ledges, on which we choose to camp out rather than press on in Him.

But if you yearn with all your heart to follow Jesus and to serve His purposes, you

find yourself moving into the funnel stem. There in the stem, your desires and ambitions are swallowed up by His wonderful *agape* love. That was the place of stillness for Much-Afraid, desiring only to “do that which he had told her.”

The natural love and human desires that Much-Afraid tried so desperately to root out from her very being are all that many of us have ever known. We enter this world screaming for nourishment and the touch that expresses love — and that’s not wrong! Babies who *don’t* receive cuddling and response to their cries fail to thrive, even to the point of death.

But the human hunger for love can overwhelm all our other motivations. We can become obsessed with requiring others to love us the way we *want* them to. That can call for all sorts of hoops for individuals to have to jump through in order for their love to be *received* as love. And such a narrow framework for love in a relationship can be crippling.

A dear older woman complained to us that she never felt loved by her children or grandchildren. We happened to know that these various relatives were actually very attentive and demonstrative in their affection. But this woman had very precise demands of them, and if they didn’t fulfill these requirements, *nothing* they did was seen as loving from her perspective. That can be pretty frustrating for everyone!

Much-Afraid recognized that the roots of human love and desire in her were hindering intimacy with her Shepherd. But no matter how hard she tried in her own meager strength to dislodge them, her efforts were futile.

Does that mean that followers of Jesus can’t relish the loving joy we share with our spouse, children, friends? Of course not! Jesus emphasized repeatedly the need for His disciples to love one another in very real, sacrificial ways.

But if your natural love is more important to you than your love for Him, then that natural love needs to be reexamined

and diminished. Your relational priorities have become skewed. The objects of your natural love have become idols, and our Lord is jealous to be first in His people’s lives. That’s why Jesus spoke words that confound those who aren’t united in Him: “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my disciple*” (Luke 14: 26). This means that our love for Him must be so great that in comparison, the rightful love we have for others would seem like hatred.

Do you remember the testing undergone by the patriarch Abraham, the first “called-out one”? If he was to be the father of all who trust and obey their Lord fully, then anything that might interfere had to be removed. Abraham’s long-awaited and much beloved son Isaac could have become an idol to the old man and his elderly wife. Therefore, the patriarch’s obedient trust was put on the line. Was he willing to sacrifice this son of the promise God had made to him?

You can almost hear the thoughts scurrying through his mind. Yet Abraham trusted this God Who had miraculously given him this now-teenager. Surely, he reasoned, He can bring him back to life even from death’s dark door.

That’s trust! But it didn’t come all of a sudden. Abraham had to be resolute in his relationship with God long before he and the lad made their fateful climb up Mount Moriah’s rocky sides. If not, his natural love would have dissuaded him, and reason would have found him balking.

Abraham, the first Hebrew, stood firm in His relationship of love-grounded obedient trust. This is the same powerful relationship in Jesus that our Father is restoring — the *Hebraic* foundation of our lifelong pilgrimage with our Shepherd. The roots which Jesus expanded into fully a heart issue emanated from this walk of Abraham with his Lord.

It’s the same test of obedient devotion confronting Much-Afraid, and the same test

that faces each of us who yearn to walk in our Master's steps. The *agape*, self-sacrificing love that our Lord demands makes natural love pale in comparison.

- Are you in a place in your journey in which you can truly affirm that Jesus is first in your heart and life?
- How would you explain that sort of love to someone who has yet to walk in union with Jesus?

**12. For the first time she felt...; 13. At that the indistinct figure behind the altar...**

True fellowship in the Body of Jesus is when one Christ-follower helps another Christ-follower to walk more fully in the Master. It's always a fine line between helping someone out and presumptuously stepping in to relieve suffering that's been orchestrated by our Father for their good.

If the Holy Spirit has anointed you with a gift of mercy, it's especially important that you await His impulse before you charge ahead to allay pain or discomfort. You may find yourself forging ahead and interfering in a situation in which you don't have our Father's perfect perspective. You might be wanting to bring comfort when our Father is expanding His child's patient endurance, or even bringing him or her to repentance!

Nature abounds with examples of intense struggle needed for life to thrive. If you misguidedly peel the shell off a squirming exhausted chick, you will have stunted the muscle growth that its struggle would have strengthened. If you seemingly come to the aid of a writhing butterfly as it wiggles out of its cocoon, you will have doomed it. That struggle is necessary for its wings to fully develop.

Sorrow and Suffering wisely deferred from stepping in to tear out natural love from their companion's heart. They realized that her heartrending plea was outside the scope of their call from the Shepherd. Much-Afraid's spiritual growth would be stunted by anything other than doing their part, and *only* their part, of the Master's plan.

The Shepherd's intent was for Much-Afraid to understand that *He alone* could excise her natural desires in order for His seed of *agape* love to bloom. "*I call to God, the Most High, to God who is accomplishing his purpose for me*" (Psalm 57:2)

All throughout Scripture we find people crying out for help. Time and again Israel finds herself in desperate straits, calling to a God they *know about*. But they fail to *be* the people that belong to Him heart, soul, mind and strength. When their need has been satisfied, they turn away from Him shamelessly.

The God of the Bible wants a relationship with His people that far transcends "grandfather in the sky" overflowing with goodies. How vital that we today heed the warning proclaimed to ancient Israel: "*Am I supposed to redeem them when they have spoken lies against Me? They have not cried out to Me from their hearts, even though they wail on their beds. They assemble themselves for grain and wine, yet turn away from Me*" (Hosea 7:13b,14).

Our Father used trials and challenges as opportunities for seekers to find Him and for the faithful to grow deeper in Him. But all too often, shortsighted believers rush in to put a bandaid over a devastating spiritual cancer. Be sure that your help is motivated in response to the Spirit's command, and not just your own natural response to alleviate suffering.

- When has someone hampered your spiritual growth by trying to relieve a pain or trial that our Father intended to be good for you? When did you realize that your "helper" had made a mistake?

- How has the Spirit helped you discern between a door of service that He has opened and one that He has purposely closed to you?

**14. Much-Afraid turned toward him...; 15. He came and stood beside her...; 16. There was complete silence...**

Note that there is only one priest at this crisis point in Much-Afraid's life. He's not surrounded by under-priests to do His bidding or to assist. This priest alone is sufficient, a quiet presence of whom she has no fear.

How well Much-Afraid knows herself as she pleads with this priest to bind her to the altar! And how deep is her love for the Shepherd that she so wants to ensure that she not "be found struggling while the will of [her] Lord is done."

Rather than bring down the Shepherd's reputation, Much-Afraid preferred to limit her own freedom so that He could accomplish His will in her. She much preferred to take on His identity rather than cling to even a vestige of her former self. Her cry mirrors the plea of King David: "*From the end of the earth, with fainting heart, I call to you. Set me down on a rock far above where I am now*" (Psalm 61:2).

The complete silence that followed her request perhaps is a picture of the wonder of the angels "who long to look into these things." None in the heavenlies, neither angel nor demon, has the kind of relationship in our frailty and weakness that followers of Jesus have with their Father.

Being bound "hand and foot" is significant for you as well as for Much-Afraid. Hands often represent what you *do*, your actions. Feet refer to your ability to *go* where you need to. By this binding, Much-Afraid is affirming herself as the Shepherd's *beloved bondslave* as so often referred to by Paul. For that is truly what Lordship entails: He alone is the Master, and we, in walking with His

Spirit, are His slaves as well as His co-heirs and family. He has the right to tell us, as His own, what to do, where to go, and what to say.

He has set you aside to be in union with Him for His purposes. He continues to refine you to more readily and eagerly responsive to that purpose!

- Do you have crisis points or serious issues at hand in which you find yourself struggling, complaining, or walking in less than the trust that would bring Him praise?

- How has following Jesus "bound" your hands (what you choose to do) and feet (where you choose to go)? How has your life changed as you've yielded these prerogatives to your Shepherd?

**17. When he had finished...; 18. Still there was silence...**

Sue: I can't help but marvel at the hope of those who have preceded us in Jesus under exceedingly difficult circumstances. From the heroes of the faith recounted in Hebrews chapter 11 to present-day martyrs clinging to Jesus through unimaginable torture, their *hope* has sustained them.

Our lives here in America generally aren't greatly impacted by the "hopes" we express: "I hope it doesn't rain." "I hope my son calls today." Yet it's an unshakable hope in her Shepherd's faithfulness that urges Much-Afraid to lay down her life. This isn't mere wish or maybe! She's betting her all that being in Him is of far greater worth than even the pleasure of human love.

She knows she's come to die to herself, to be buried to her old fears and insecurities, and to offer up the as yet unfulfilled promises which have carried her thus far. She's come to that wonderful place of finding her rest only in Him: "*My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone*

*is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken” (Psalm 62:1,2).*

Our Shepherd is calling you, too, to a two-fold mission: to die to all your deeply entrenched desires and plans, and to cling to the hope of that which He promises to fulfill in you in His timing, even unto death.

Some people have pretty well let go of their own ambitions and desires, but they haven’t committed to holding onto only His promises! It’s a two-fold process — one hand lets go of the old so that the other can take hold of His and press on.

Our Father never intends for you to be drifting along purposelessly until eternity’s gate opens for you. One of the most basic of the seven needs He’s instilled in you is the need for purpose and meaning in Him. He’s not short on revealing it to you if your heart is free from the entangling alliances of natural wants and dreams.

- What particular promises of God have you latched onto with hope as unshakable as Much-Afraid’s?
- Can you agree with Job that no matter where your journey takes you, “Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him” (13:15)? What particular desires and plans have you willingly placed on His altar so that He can direct your path?

**19. The priest put forth a hand of steel...; 20. He held it for a moment...**

“The time had come.” *Perfect timing* describes our Father’s intervention exactly. He knows the beginning and the end of a matter, and everything in between. So why should you fret along the way if you fully trust His sovereignty and right to decide?

Timing is part of the character of our Father. Study the beautiful harmony of

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and notice how the “time” element intertwines every aspect of life.

His timing is key. You can jump in with the noblest heart to attempt great things for God, but if the timing isn’t His, then the fruit won’t be either. How many zealous young missionaries have painfully returned from the field because the timing was not of God? Perhaps their hearts were not yet free of demonic strongholds, or they weren’t yet wise with the maturity of life’s lessons, or their families weren’t emotionally or spiritually ready.

Mike: The Spirit has gifted me with a prophetic anointing to share God’s truths to His people at large as well as to individuals as He directs. But I’ve learned (painfully) over the years that the moment He breathes a message to me isn’t necessarily the time He releases me to share it. Sometimes I’ve sat on a message for years until the Spirit has said it was time!

- Recount an instance in which you spiritually jumped the gun and discovered that what you thought God wanted you to do was ill-timed, not well-received, and fruitless.
- Why was it so important for Much-Afraid that “not a rootlet was torn or missing” from her natural love and desires? What happens when natural gets in the way of agape love?

**21. When he had said this...; 22. Then, utterly exhausted, she fell asleep.**

Completely at peace and totally spent, Much-Afraid falls into a deep sleep. This stage of her journey has been the culmination of her preparation in her quest for the High Places with the Shepherd. She has yielded every dream, every degree of self-ownership, to the altar of love-grounded obedient trust in the Shepherd. All vestiges

of her companions, Sorrow and Suffering, have disappeared.

Oh what freedom of spirit comes when worries and fears are consumed on His altar! Sue: For our first few weeks in Israel, I was plagued by unwarranted fear of being killed (and this was long before the tragic suicide bombings that have so devastated the people of that land). Those thoughts were so vivid that I actually had dreams of specific ways in which I'd be killed!

But then the Spirit's reminder broke through my agitation: "Is your Father still sovereign? Can a sparrow fall without Him knowing?"

As I purposely chose to focus on my Father's Lordship and my "childship" relationship with Him, I realized how those fears had shifted my focus away from Him and onto myself. I had forgotten in Whose hand my very life depended: "*For You have been my help; in the shadow of Your wings I rejoice; my heart **clings to You; Your right hand supports me***" (Psalm 63:7,8).

My Father's right hand of *power and authority* supports me! With conscious decision to rely on the Spirit within me, I burned

up those thoughts on His altar in my mind, the very place where they had so tormented me. At that point, it didn't matter if my life or my death better suited His purposes. He was, and remains, my King and my Lord.

When your heart is filled with desire to bring Him praise, there's no room for debilitating sorrow and self-condemning suffering.

- Did you wince when you read about the priest's "hand of steel" ripping and rending all of Much-Afraid's natural love and dreams? What went through your mind?
- What is hindering you from letting Him consume all that's hampering you from walking in His steps?