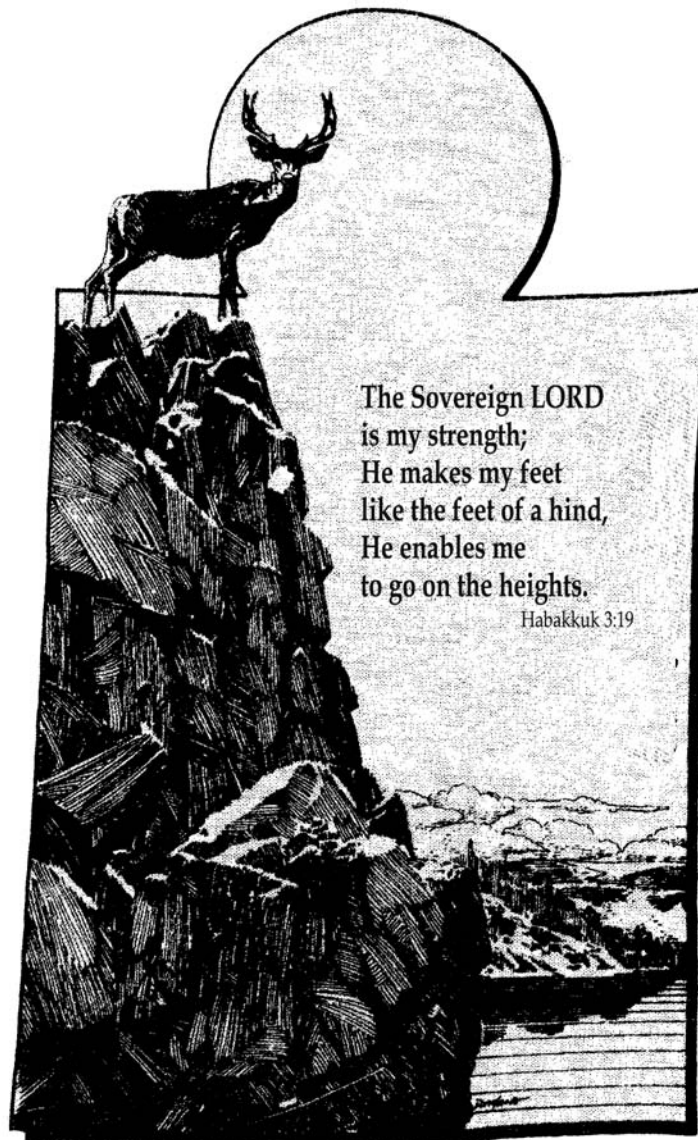


Going to the High Places

Chapter 5 *Encounter with Pride*



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Introduction

Pride is much more than a five letter word. It is the very essence of Satan, whom the Bible indicates wanted to be worshiped as God. There's no indication that his desires have changed, although his dire end is disclosed ! He is the embodiment of the anti-Christ spirit that John tells us is now operating to seduce the world into worshipping our adversary.

There is no middle ground here. Either you worship our Father *in Spirit and in truth*, or by default your life worships the prince of the power of the air.

Pride touches the core of our earthly identity. It is part of our ego, the driving force behind our quest for recognition, importance, and feeling good about ourselves. Pride affects all humans to one degree or another. But in Jesus Christ, pride becomes confronted by His desire that we learn humility — to esteem others above ourselves, and to serve them in His Name.

Foreign to our human nature, Sorrow and Suffering are indispensable in producing true humility of heart. Some of you, especially if you're married, are finding tensions being aroused along this journey, perhaps even to the point of irritation and anger. But as sure as you may feel about your own particular viewpoint, it's *pride* at work in you! The differences you're confronting aren't your real problem, the *negative feelings* are.

Let's go on into this chapter and see how Much-Afraid's encounter with pride taught her an unforgettably painful lesson.

Chapter 5 *Encounter With Pride*

1. From the very beginning...

As Much-Afraid discovered to her dismay, the steepness of the path obliterated any "rose garden" mentality she may have imagined regarding her journey. The ascent to Christian maturity surprises you with both joy and complications. Our Father has designed your life pathway so that you will

both need Him and need others — journey companions — so that you'll be stretched. If you could walk in triumph alone you'd never understand the interconnectedness of the Body of Christ and the interdependency of your spirit to Jesus and to each other.

Much-Afraid didn't realize that she was part of a strong three-fold cord with her two companions. (You, as well, have such a cord with your partner(s) and with the Spirit of Jesus!) Her companions were *available* to assist her, but she had to choose to receive their aid.

Her interaction with Sorrow and Suffering was not intended to frustrate and drag her down, but to draw her onward and lift her spirit upwards. It's really a matter of perspective, isn't it! What you might perceive as punishment from God or attack from the enemy may really be a refining fire so that your disbelief in Him can be burned away.

Much-Afraid, as well as we, needed to understand that our loving Father's intent is to conform us to Jesus. Since He walked the path of suffering to achieve His goal, we too must follow in His steps. (This is a good time to pause and ponder 1 Peter 1:5-7 to reinforce our Father's goodness in helping you to mature your trust's *genuineness*.)

Much-Afraid discovered what all of us find as we begin to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. We've written in a prior newsletter about the differentiation among the "*called, chosen, and those found faithful*." In the final assessment of our Christian lives, all three are critical: "*They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers*" (Rev.17:14).

A warning: Those who stop either at being called or chosen will attack those who press on in His power to be found faithful. As with Much-Afraid's relatives, people who choose to stay in the Valley of their Strongholds often attack the ones who try to leave.

This is where you need to make your life's decision: How far do you really want to go with Jesus? The *call* emanates from God.

Many may hear His invitation to life, but as the parables of Jesus so poignantly reveal, many get sidetracked into the pursuits of this world.

So many responded at first with zeal to follow Jesus, but after His discourse regarding His blood in John 6, many of His *disciples* — those who had responded to the call — turned away. Jesus tells us, “*For many are called, but few are chosen*” (Matt. 22:14).

A certain nature testifies to those who are found faithful:

- They “*produce fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Luke 3:8a).
- They are assured that “*the kingdom of God will be taken away from [the unfaithful] and given to a people who will produce its fruit*” (Matt. 21:43).
- They have heeded the warning of Jesus: “*Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me*” (John 15:4).

The faithful will be fruitful! The yielded of heart are available vessels for our Father to receive much praise by the work the Spirit does through these faithful ones. And that loving, trusting availability determines just how much fruit the Spirit brings forth in His faithful one: “*Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop — thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown*” (Mark 4:20).

In our book, *God’s Instruments for War*, we recount “A Parable of War” written by our friend, Paul Knight. Sue and I hope none of us gives in to the lethargy and dissipation that the coming darkness is already producing in the lives of many who say they are God’s children.

A Parable of War

We were sitting outside the village frustrated. We had been enlisted to defend and win the alle-

giance of the members of the village for the Crown. But there seemed to be so little response to the consistent goodness of the throne. We, the soldiers of the King, were growing tired and apathy was around us like a dense fog.

It was then that we heard the blast of the horns warning us that they were advancing. The Enemy, whom we had grown to hate and despise, was advancing his troops close to the village.

We knew full well that the enemy and his workers were ruthless. They breathed the fire of hatred. As the others around us began to speak, we knew that the village we were caring for and seeking to win would be devastated. One of the female soldiers with us began to cry out in alarm for the innocent children who would be devoured in the jaws of wickedness and deprivation. Her voice cracked with fear and urgency, for she had been one of their prisoners. Her scars, emotional and physical, were still fresh.

Those around the woman, knowing that the King had prepared us with a power far beyond that of our enemy’s, stood in resolve to fight. We shouted to our fellow soldiers to stand and bear arms for the King, to defend the village and to fight against the advance of the army.

We sent messengers into the village, sounding warnings again and again that the enemy would take prisoners. We testified to the tactics of the enemy and to the promised care for those who follow the King. Some followed and took up arms with us. We resolved to defend to the end those left and to continue begging their enlistment under the King’s banner.

When we returned to our camp outside the village, we again tried to rally our fellow soldiers to stand and to prepare for battle. The enemy had landed and was advancing with greater strength. We could hear the hellish cries of those who were being taken and those who so joyously performed the enemy’s deeds of war. From the infants to the aged, we knew that they would be trampled and put in bondage. Untold horrors would be their fate. We again cried out to our fellow soldiers to stand and to fight.

A few of us ran to our fellow soldiers and with tear-filled eyes begged them to stand and to bear arms. But the fog had grown so thick, it seemed not only to block their vision but to silence our cries in their ears. They continued to rest and to talk.

One of our comrades was again explaining

how to fight, how to use weapons. He was explaining the need to defend ourselves and the people of the village. With sweat on his brow and with great passion he began to lift our fellow soldiers up, urging them to stand. In panic he was running from person to person, propping them up, but they did not want to stand. In exhaustion, our comrade fell among them. We wept.

With greater determination we began to fight, still urging our fellow soldiers to stand. All around us the devastation, even of the King's army, began to overwhelm us. Still we cried out to stand and to bear arms for the One Who cared for us. We shouted out the names of the villagers. With fading breath we called out, "Help us, please fight with us. The enemy is here!"

Tragically, so many who hear and accept the call are never found faithful. How few go on to fight and bear fruit for the King...

- You've come to this point after leaving the Valley of your fears. What are your current trials and challenges? Who is facing them with you?
- When was the last time you were encouraged to press on in your walk with Jesus so that you could be available for our Father's use of you to *bear much fruit for Him*? Are you used to hearing soothing words about Jesus meeting all *your* needs so you can "be at rest"? Has it occurred to you that your greatest peace and rest come precisely when you're walking in the purposes He has for your life to impact others for His glory?

2. It was not very long...

Three sharp realities confronted Much-Afraid at this point:

- the steepness of the climb (her life's journey)
- her own lameness ("so little trust")
- her enemies (her Fearing relatives)

That initial thrill of breaking out of complacent religious practice in order to grow in the character of Christlikeness generally loses its luster pretty quickly. The parable of the four kinds of soil in Mark 4:3-20 portrays your *depth of determination* to press on to His goal for you.

The first type of soil is filled with "me" focus: "I'm clean! I'm free! I'm loved!" Those are wonderful truths, but if you don't exercise diligence to fill in the ruts of your old priorities and choices with the responses of Jesus through His Spirit and His Word, then your new life will be deceptively snatched from you. Satan doesn't give up His possessions easily!

Other enemies burst the bubbles of joyous trust in the second type of soil. When troubles or persecution come your way because of your relationship with Jesus, you falter. Your friends might call you a rebel or religious fanatic and scorn you. With no rootedness in Him, you fall away and become inoculated against the Gospel: "Been there, done that" is your cynical attitude when someone else shares Jesus with you. The path you embarked on became too steep for you, and your spiritual lameness was insufficient to keep your heart yearning for Jesus.

Worries, wealth, and worldly desires can choke any potential for fruitfulness from the third type of soil. You may be like Peter, confident that you are a trusting disciple. But then swells of doubt wash over your trust as worry and anxiety squeeze your heart. You begin to doubt that He's even listening, much less that He'll answer.

Whenever you sense distance between you and your heavenly Father, cry out to Him for help immediately! When you feel as though He's far off, you're not only extremely vulnerable to attack, but much more likely to listen to accusatory voices. When you decide not to embrace the sorrow and suffering He's designed for your character development, you leave open your heart door to attacks of pride and self-sufficiency.

- Are you more concerned over your well-being, security and reputation than you are about being available to Jesus anywhere, anyhow, to any person He directs you?
- Do you secretly resent your husband for not stretching financially for a roomier house, newer car, nicer furniture? Do you secretly resent your wife for not being content to live within the means of your income? Do you secretly resent our Lord for withholding from you a longed-for perceived need?
- How did the positive selection impact your self-esteem? your involvement in other activities or relationships? the response of your family, friends, coworkers toward you?
- How did the negative singling out impact your self-esteem? your involvement in other activities or relationships? the response of your family, friends, coworkers toward you?

3. To explain this we must..., 4. Who was Much-Afraid...

Being “singled-out” is very special, whether as a child picked for a team, a teen writing a winning essay, or an employee receiving recognition for a job well done. Being among the “called, chosen and faithful” of our Lord Jesus is the most wonderful singling out there can be!

To be singled out for inhabitation by His Spirit and then joyfully sharing in the work He’s prepared in advance for you to do is a life that shines, overcoming the world’s darkness in your personal realm of relationships. That way you never have to fear looking over your shoulder at what you’ve left behind for His sake!

- What stands out in your life as an honor, event, or achievement in which you were singled out in a positive way? How did you feel at the time?
- Were you ever singled out in a painful way for your ethnic heritage, your appearance, a personality quirk, or a failure to perform adequately? How did you feel during that episode?

5. So it happened...

“Did you hear about so-and-so?” That has to be one of the most common conversation openers that ever greased the gossip skids. Whether you know the pinpointed person or not, you’re likely to be showered with TMI — Too Much Information, as our niece calls it — unless you exercise these key habits. Refuse to listen to the morsel; instead, ask the one speaking to join you in meeting with the subject to determine if the information is true. The Bible is very clear about the evil that the tongue can perpetrate, especially through slander and gossip. So watch your tongue as well as your *heart*, because that’s where those sinful thoughts originate! (Mark 7:21)

Be especially vigilant against so-called “prayer needs” that are gossip in disguise. You know what we mean: “Please pray for my husband, he’s hooked on pornography.” “Please pray that my boss stop treating me so badly.” Or the classic, “Please pray for my parents to come to Jesus — they’ve treated me and my husband so bad by”

Do you see what’s wrong with this picture? Are YOU able to contact the maligned individual to understand the WHOLE story and thereby help bring about reconciliation? As Proverbs 18:17 reminds us, *“The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward to question him.”* What might

seem to be a prayer request is *slander* because you haven't verified the validity of the statement! Be careful in what you hear or read or send via the phone or the Internet. Lots of people can take up an offense on your behalf against someone they've never even met when all they're hearing is one-sided information!

If you and those with you on the trip have freed yourselves from demonic strongholds, you can bet you're receiving considerable demonic scrutiny. Satan has lost the influence in your life he once had, and now you're on the journey that will enable you to be more useful to his enemy, Jesus Christ.

The strongholds of others who were once close to you in the Valley of your Strongholds are now being agitated to hinder your trip. Satan knows your weaknesses and will send messengers to turn you from the journey of transformation.

In *Restoring the Early Church* we recount a fictitious satanic meeting called to halt the progress of the suffering, persecuted early Church:

In the third century Satan must have called a BIG meeting with his demons. Hades 1, he probably called it. Since persecution had failed so miserably, this diabolical council needed to develop a new strategy to undermine the life of the church...The objectives were clear: The plan would have to diffuse the self-sacrificing love that carried the church through conflict, distract it from intimacy with God, and devalue the importance of the individual believer...Someone came up with a very simple idea: 'Trying to keep it small hasn't worked—let's make it big!' What would happen if the church suddenly became acceptable? Many would come just for social reasons. They would quickly dilute those who are really in God's clutches. And imagine all the programs and activities they would have to plan to keep those people happy. Nothing chokes out intimacy as well as busyness. The church would eventually become a machine, chew-

ing up individuals instead of loving them. They couldn't possibly teach all the followers to walk with God personally, so they would soon substitute rules and guidelines for His ever-present voice. The machine would have to be run by professionals. The others would become nothing more than spectators and bill-payers. (from *The Naked Church* by Wayne Jacobsen)

Satan wouldn't be beyond giving you worldly success to rob you of your childlike dependency on your Father. Don't let *circumstances* be a way of determining whether you think God is pleased with you. Our persecuted brethren around the world would differ with you vehemently!

- When was the last time you were on the disseminating end of a tidbit about someone else, even if it was disguised as a "prayer request"? When were you on the receiving end? Has the Spirit been speaking to you about making some changes in this regard?
- Have you ever been the *subject* of a slanderous attack and found out about it? How did that affect your relationship with those who you know heard the slander or passed it on without talking with you about it?

6. A great consultation went on...

Much-Afraid's relatives had no qualms about resorting to plots to turn her loyalty away from following the Shepherd. Did they think they were doing wrong in this scheming? No!

You'd be amazed at the number of scheming plots that take place in the Bible. Jesus was plotted against repeatedly by religious authorities. And Paul! Hardly a chapter goes by after we first encounter him (post-conversion) in the Book of Acts that someone isn't out to destroy either him or his reputation!

Today's plots aren't confined to politics, businesses or criminals. Any time you take an unpopular righteous stand in an unrighteous situation, someone's going to try to discredit you. *How you respond* to that attack is key to your spiritual progress.

Our Lord is sovereign. He could intervene at any time to expose the plot, reveal the truth and vindicate you. But then His higher goal of spiritual maturity in your life would be stunted. Some things you just have to go through, as we see in Much-Afraid's case. Remember this if you recognize that plotting has been or is going on against you: Our Father wants only what is best for you, and can turn the most unpleasant situations into gold for your character!

- Can you think of a time when a plot was planned or enacted to tarnish your reputation or remove you from a position of influence?
- How did the outcome change your life, both your inner person as well as your life circumstances? Looking back, how would you describe God's involvement to bring about a change for your good?

7. In the end it was unanimously decided...8. Besides, it was a well-known fact...

What is it about pride that brings about our Father's resistance? Our culture idolizes feeling good about yourself and getting noticed. That's why so much advertising is based on the premise that if you have their particular product, you'll attract admiration and have reason to elevate your self-appraisal.

But that horizontal focus leads down two very slippery slopes of comparison. If you succeed in gaining attention for who you are and what you have, you'll esteem yourself higher than others, a trap Paul warns against

in Romans 12:3. Your self-evaluation should be according to the measure of trust God has given you, based on Kingdom values with Jesus as our standard.

If you come up short in your comparison with others according to the world's standards, you'll be inclined to bury yourself in despair and self-rejection. Neither pride nor worldly sorrow allow you to be available for our Lord's purposes.

If you yearn to be found faithful, you'll recognize and avoid the three varieties of pride found in this verse. Pride serves only self!

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world,

- *the cravings of sinful man,*
- *the lust of his eyes*
- *and the boasting of what he has and does*

comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15,16).

Think about the implications of that passage for a moment. If any of these motives drives you, *"the love of the Father is not in you."* The very love that you desire to have cannot be yours if any of these motives is a quest in your life. Now, pause here and describe the motives of your life to your journey partner. Are they Spirit-birthed or sin-derived?

If you discover that your motives are self-serving, **Repent.** Purpose to turn from that and receive our Lord's forgiveness so you can walk on the path the Spirit wants to empower you. You can draw great strength from the verses that enjoin us to *please God!* HE gives you the will and the desire and the power to serve His purposes as a loving child. Remind yourself of His goodness and of all He's done and is doing in your life, and respond with *gratefulness!*

Your most effective weapon against the subtle attacks of pride is a robe of humility. Our Lord saw fit to mold you as the vessel He intends you to be, and for that you need

to incline your heart toward Him with thanksgiving rather than grumble about your appearance or level of capabilities. Without His strengthening presence *none* of us could accomplish His will and walk in His love!

- Do any of these pride traps — craving for what you don't have, lust for physical gratification, boasting of acquisitions and accomplishments — plague you? Are you willing to *turn from these motivations* in order to “*count it as dung and suffer loss*” if He called you to do that?
- What dissatisfaction of yourself or your life circumstances do you want to put on our Lord's altar so you can press on with thanksgiving and contentment?

9. Much-Afraid and her two companions...

Just when you feel you're progressing in character transformation, a test challenges your resolve. Maybe you've had a lifelong battle with anger but have found to your delight that you're able to recognize the former fuses that set you off. You've responded with self-control and forgiveness through the work of the Spirit. In fact, you feel so good about your progress that you're starting to wonder why others give way to anger or rage or frustration. After all, *you* aren't!

Even if it's just in your thought life, picking at the scab of anger in your neighbor when you yourself would have the same response were it not for the work of Jesus in you is PRIDE. The same goes for your response to those who have yet to encounter Jesus and His power to change lives. Don't forget what He lifted *you* out of in order to stand on His higher ground! We ALL have humble spiritual beginnings because we each were slaves to sin. To cast darts at those who live under Satan's tyranny will not win

them for Jesus!

- At this point in your journey, what is the besetting sin that you're most thankful is no longer your prison?
- Have you ever found yourself despising someone else for a particular sin, wondering how they could ever do such a thing? What is the Spirit telling you about your attitude?

10. Pride himself...; 11. How do you do...

As we mentioned earlier, *distance from God makes you vulnerable*. Paragraph 10 indicates, “Yet apparently the Shepherd himself was not with her.” You know that He's never more than a call for help away. But that feeling of distance can hinder your readiness to cry out to Him. Often you find yourself confronting temptation in your own strength, and wondering why you're sinking.

One of the most disarming attacks of the enemy is flattery. If there is a tinge of pride in you, those slippery words will have their intended effect. “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you...*” (Luke 6:26).

A friend once said that our strengths can be our greatest point of weakness for the enemy's attack. The arena in which you see our Father using you can become a trap if you draw your identity from that particular work. For instance, at the retreat center several younger people in particular so trusted my prophetic counsel that they started to rely more on me than on seeking out God's will themselves. God may have given me the insights but it became a trap because they weren't learning how to hear the Shepherd's voice themselves.

As our reputation at the center grew, so did the attention of those in various church leadership capacities. Those who believed that the gift of prophecy was valid for today and was helping to change lives were grate-

ful. Those who were threatened by something they didn't believe were agitated. It's a good thing I didn't believe all the press I was getting, because God had other plans for our lives. He intended to put the prophetic gifting on a back burner so that we could more adequately walk in His new assignment for us.

"The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives" (Pro. 27:21). Be sure that you remember the Source of any goodness that has come about in your character along the way! You aren't "naturally good" even though you might be more prone to do "good things" than others are. It's only through reliance on the Spirit that you're able to bless anyone so that they can give praise to our Father in the manner that Jesus did!

- In what particular arena do you think you operate most effectively? Have you found yourself relying more on your own expertise than on the work of the Spirit to function as our Lord wants you to?
- Are there any areas in which you've thought, "I could never do *that* for God! That's not who I am!?" Are you willing to yield to His right to assign you to something in which you feel you're inadequate?

12. "Much-Afraid," said Pride seriously...

Have you ever noticed that when your life seems to be going well — no storms, no trials, no temptations to speak of — your awareness of your need for diligence to seek Jesus in prayer and His Word starts to slip?

In the fray of assaults and stress, you *know* how much you need His power and His *rhema* (God's personal guidance for you), to press on! But when the calm lull of complacency has lulled you to believe it will always be this pleasant, BE ON GUARD! The battle may not be raging in your life at the

moment, but in order to press on, there will be skirmishes to recognize and confront!

Sue: Mike and I have learned to not be surprised by a wolf-pack attack after a period of rest and renewal. One or two problems might lure us into thinking we can handle them on our own. But when the bottom drops out, we're awakened to our need for more diligent prayer and insights from His Word and from those praying on our behalf!

It's comforting to know that even when we stagger under assaults, we aren't the only ones crying out for His intervention. As Peter so kindly reminds us, *"Stand against him [the Adversary], firm in your trust, knowing that your brothers throughout the world are going through the same kinds of suffering"* (1 Peter 5:9).

- How would you describe your part in the spiritual war right now: On the frontlines? In the background supporting the warriors? In the hospital recovering? On leave, relaxing? Desperate for the skirmish to stop?
- What recurrent situation most often drops you to your knees to call out to the Shepherd for His intervention?

13. "My dear cousin"...,14. Do you know what will happen to you?...

If flattery doesn't trap you, then comes the lie that "...he will abandon you altogether, and you will be put to lasting shame." This is a direct attack on the character of Jesus and on your personal trust-based relationship with your Lord!

Has He ever broken any of His promises to you? Of course not! He's loved you too much to give in to the old nature desires you may be coddling, so any so-called "unanswered prayers" are a lie from the enemy. He *always* answers the cry of His trusting child — but His answer is according to *His will* and what is best *from His perspective* for His

beloved child!

If you're a parent, think back to how many times you had to say "No" or "Not now" to your child. You didn't say that to hurt him! You just had greater wisdom in the matter than he did.

Satan loves to stir up doubt about our Father's faithfulness. Note the sneering insinuation to Much-Afraid that the Shepherd is "well-known to have seduced other helpless victims." If you perceive that you're a victim who is being dragged along this journey into Christlike character, then you've swallowed the lie.

If your spouse or traveling companion has to nag and drag you to pursue Him and walk in what He's revealed, then you're giving way to religion rather than to a relationship with the Shepherd of your soul.

His yoke is easy and His burden is light. It's YOUR stubborn willfulness or deceived fearfulness to change that is proclaiming to others that His path is impossibly hard!

He Who has promised to never forsake you is faithful to hold onto the hand you extend. Remember that Peter began to sink in the crashing waves when he took his eyes of trust off the Savior. You, too, will falter if, in your own "wild, desolate" circumstances, you choose not to trust. Jesus NEVER lies! Satan ALWAYS lies!

- Did you come to Jesus believing that everything from here on in would be easier — "happy ever after"? What have you learned along the way that has shifted your toddler perspective to the more mature reality that His true joy can withstand the worst trials?
- What's the worst thing that could happen to you if you pressed on in the obedient trust and love that Jesus is calling you to? Do you fear being put to shame by that "worst thing"?

15. Poor Much-Afraid tried to pull...

Once you try to fight back in your own strength you're on the devil's turf. Your carnal nature, your old fleshly domain, and his evil nature are very much alike. That's one familiarity you should pull away from as soon as you recognize it!

FLEE that pride or whatever your fleshly impulse is, and call out for help to your heavenly Father!

Sue: I can identify with Much-Afraid's struggle! I recall how torn I was between wanting ME as the boss of my life, and turning my life over to Jesus in humility to receive His forgiveness and reconciliation with my Father. Mike's sister had been so dramatically changed by Him when she repented and received His Spirit. She became one ball of fire in sharing the Gospel!

But that frightened me. I really feared that He might drag me off to Africa as a missionary if I yielded to Him! I'd never thought that I'd sinned or needed to "be saved" (talk about pride!), and I sure didn't want to give in to something I thought was "horribly plausible and true."

Praise to Jesus that He brought me to the point of peering into the wickedness of my heart — my selfishness, my anger, and yes, my pride — so that I had no doubt about His love and His offer of forgiveness and fellowship with Him. (And I was even willing to go to Nigeria had the door opened!)

- What struggle are you engaged in (or have been recently) that seems "horribly plausible and true" if you yield to the desire of Jesus to lead you onward?
- Recall an instance in which you knew He was calling you to humble yourself, even if you realized the outcome could be painful. How did it turn out? What did you learn from this situation?

16. Did she not often find..., 17. It is a terrible thing...

Can you see why it's so important to take captive those thoughts that don't conform to Jesus? If you allow them to fester, they'll nibble away at your trust in His sovereignty and love! Much-Afraid started to doubt the Shepherd's lovingkindness because she felt she couldn't endure the ridicule her vain imaginings were conjuring up. She was edging back toward the "elemental spirits" that had so controlled her in the Valley (see Gal. 4:8,9).

The more you entertain the fears that Pride insinuates, the more you'll set them in mental concrete as fact — and they aren't even real! Join hands with your journey partner and renounce Pride and all its corollaries, trusting in the loving power and authority of the Shepherd to fill in that old rut with a peaceable spirit that *fears not!*

Sue and I often hear demonic whispers designed to trip us up. Yes, they frequently align themselves with thoughts that have previously crossed our minds. Demonic thoughts can build upon your own doubt or unbelief. The issue is, *How long* will you entertain thinking about them?

Our recent article, *The Hebraic Restoration Confronts the Jewish Roots Movement*, met with tremendous gratitude from some readers and with scathing counterattack from others. Some who once supported the work our Father has called us to have turned against us. But others can't thank us enough as they've seen the slavery of minimizing (or even forsaking) adoration of Jesus in favor of ritual observance that much of the Jewish Roots Movement is producing.

Because we care so much that people cling to Jesus alone as their righteousness, we're vulnerable. But this is where our Lord and our encouragement of one another are invaluable in helping us bring those nagging thoughts into conformity to Jesus.

The God-ordained fruit of spiritual warfare is to increase our dependency on our Lord and be conformed to His nature. Don't

lose sight of this wonderful objective, even if you lose a battle now and then. Sometimes losses are a good thing — they make us more determined to cry out for help *earlier* and *more deliberately* when the next attack comes.

- What troublesome thoughts have lately been agitating your peace and joy and trust?
- Will you purpose to take these thoughts captive and conform them to thoughts outlined by Paul in Phil. 4:8: "*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things*"? What particular thoughts can you remind yourself about that fulfill these parameters?

18. "Come back, Much-Afraid"...19. Entirely against her will...

Let's remind ourselves about our spiritual pilgrimage. Where are we going? *Why* are we going? We're not going to some geographical destination. No, most of the change that will be produced will be in the unseen areas of your heart. And your heart's circumcision will produce a way of life that's far different than your past!

The Kingdom of love is not a mythological entity like Camelot of old. That's because the love that represents Christ's Kingdom is an *action*, not a dreamy feeling! Our Father created us in union with Jesus to fulfill the good actions He's already prepared in advance for us to do! (Eph. 2:10)

Yet He didn't call His people to be mere functionaries. Those who walk in the Kingdom of Love are in relationship with Jesus, a love covenant that He initiated. And He is building together worldwide a spiritual dwelling place for Himself composed of all who trust Him. The question posed by

Pride to deter Much-Afraid is actually one each of us needs to answer: “Is living on the High Places worth the cost you are asked to pay for it?”

If your response is yes, then He will accomplish great and mighty changes in your character as you walk with Him. The changes the Spirit effects can’t help but be noticed by others: *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16). And the testimony of your changed life gives hope to them that they too can trust Jesus and find Him conforming their lives to His character.

Much-Afraid’s admission is a good one for all of us: “I am seeking the Kingdom of Love.”

- Today’s world is full of ideologies that deny Jesus and His eternal Kingdom in heaven. Can you see how the enemy has used Pride to infiltrate all corners of our society — scientific, philosophical, religious, educational to name a few — to deny the truth of the Gospel? How might you and your family be impacted by this lie?

20. “I thought as much”...; 21, Poor Much-Afraid!...

During the transformation process that comes as part of the journey to the High Places, all of us become painfully conscious of the darkness of our own soul. None of us was born with a Christlike character! This transformation can come about only for those who embrace the sanctification journey that begins when you are born again in Spirit.

Pride’s argument with Much-Afraid used the same ammunition the Pharisees of Jesus’ day used against the Jewish masses. By misusing God’s Word the rulers held in bondage the very ones God had designed for them to bless! Only the Temple dignitaries felt they had it right with God — and paraded their self-righteousness around for all to see.

How radical was the approach of the Rabbi from Nazareth! He welcomed with joy those who knew they were “poor in spirit”, who were all too aware of their sinful unworthiness to be welcomed by God. Yet their hearts longed for Him, and that hunger led to trust. Through their heart circumcision they could bypass reliance on dead works that could never lead to salvation anyway!

Notice how cousin Pride distorted Much-Afraid’s spiritual frame of reality. From God’s perspective, His blood-bought children are beautiful. They’re cloaked in the righteous loveliness of Jesus! But from the world’s standards of appraisal, the humble who recognize their need for forgiveness are “ugly and deformed.”

That’s the difference between those who think they’re good enough to merit God’s favor and those who know their total dependence on the grace and mercy of the Shepherd. His reality and the truth of His love reawakened Much-Afraid from her desperation. She knew in her heart that He had called her His beloved. Thus she could cry out for Him to come to her aid with His powerful presence!

Don’t let the demonic voices cause you to believe that God is *against* you because of the darkness in your soul, that is, your mind, will, and emotions. Your *repentance* rather than your human strength is more powerful in the battle for your soul. Through repentance — turning from your sin to God’s way — you give the Holy Spirit opportunity to work: *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 1:6).

How timely for Much-Afraid to remember the Shepherd’s words, *“I pledge myself to bring you there, and that you shall never be put to shame.”* The Spirit of the Lord can bring so much about in a humble, repentant heart. Remember His promises, and refuse to battle in your own strength: *“Come to me Shepherd! Come quickly!”*

- How has our Lord changed your heart into that of a humble “publican”, grateful that

He has chosen to love and redeem you?

- When was your most desperate hour? Did you think to call out to Jesus right away, or did you try to press on in your own strength first? What did you learn from your experience that can help others in their trials?

22. There was a sound of loose rattling...

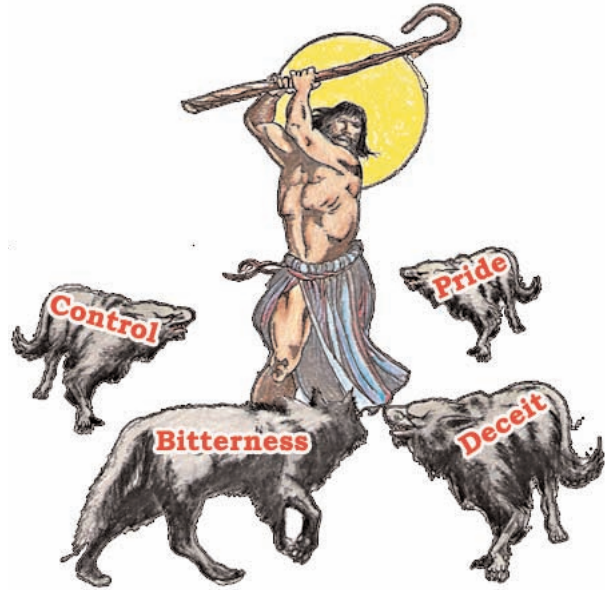
As grateful as we are for the coming of the gentle Babe in Bethlehem, we're overwhelmed with awe at the scriptural truth that our Lord on high is returning as a mighty King, the Lion of Judah!

Descending on the clouds, surrounded by countless warrior angels, this God Who Is Revealed will be seen by every eye. Among those awaiting His coming there will be great rejoicing. But those who have denied Him throughout their lives and not trusted to the end will cower in fear and hatred.

The face that was "terrible to look at" from Pride's cowardly standpoint was the face of Love itself to Much-Afraid.

Recall the church buildings in which you've worshiped over the years. How many featured statues, images or stained glass of the humble Baby and His mother, or the suffering Jesus who, for all that the sanctuary portrays, never rose victoriously from the dead? Those images are hard to displace with the reality of the unconquerable Lord whose very presence caused the apostle John to fall on His face in wonder! He IS the One of Whom all the Scriptures and the prophets testify!

A drawing of the shepherd who fights for his sheep comes to mind...



- Have you ever been in a situation in which you doubted that your Shepherd was even hearing your cry? How did His Presence break through?
- Throughout your childhood and into your teen years, what impression of Jesus did you have based on visual images you'd seen in church buildings or by the media?
- Now that you understand His Lordship as your King and Bridegroom, how has your mental image of Him changed? Are you able to envision His sovereign power and love *on your behalf* because He loves you so much?

23. "Much Afraid," said the Shepherd... 24. For the first time...

We see in these paragraphs the Shepherd's first rebuke of His beloved Much-Afraid. *She* was the one who had chosen to resist the companions He'd given her. Then, vulnerable, she had allowed the temptation of her adversary to not only engage her

thoughts but to “Take her hand” and agitate her almost to the point of fleeing the Shepherd’s path!

Her experience is a warning for each of us about the pattern the enemy uses to diffuse our loving obedience to our Shepherd’s will. Your thought life is very powerful, for from it emerges all sorts of wayward actions. That’s why we’re admonished to constantly patrol our thoughts to align them to those of Jesus!

If your thoughts are allowed to run astray, they’ll arouse emotions in regard to those thoughts. You may then take action based on those emotions, and finally become a slave to the perception that’s locked itself into your mind like a fortress — a stronghold!

For example, perhaps you recall a past angry encounter with your father. You mull that over and begin to get agitated and maybe self-defensive. Those emotions then convince you that you’re not going to make contact with him until he apologizes for hurting you. To back that up, you decide you’re not even going to attend any family functions where he might be present.

Look what’s happened here! That one uncaptured thought not only drew you to ire but convinced you of one-sided guilt against someone the Bible tells you to honor! Your father may not even be aware of your grudge, so you’re really only hurting yourself with the unforgiveness. If you don’t forgive others, then your Father in Heaven won’t forgive you. (Matt. 6:15) Now you’re really in hot water, just because you didn’t conform that thought to Jesus’ perspective!

Be careful! Much-Afraid responded to the Shepherd’s gentle but firm rebuke by recognizing her need to depend on the strength of the companions He’d given to help her. But she still had to suffer the consequences of her choices to linger with Pride. Her feet smarted, but worse, her heart was chastised, “full of pain, so bitter with sorrow.”

- What consequences of a choice you have made to disobey our Lord’s will most impacted you to not go that way again?

- What is your most recent experience in which you entertained thoughts to the extent that they agitated your emotions? What actions did you take based on those un-Christlike emotions and thoughts? Are you wiser today to recognize this devilish ploy to slime your mind?

25. She learned in this way the first important lesson on her journey upward...

Remember, pride is so consumed with self that dependence on Jesus and enjoyment of His presence is forgotten. Much-Afraid had to learn her lesson through anguish because she never anticipated that her journey would call for struggle against old enemies.

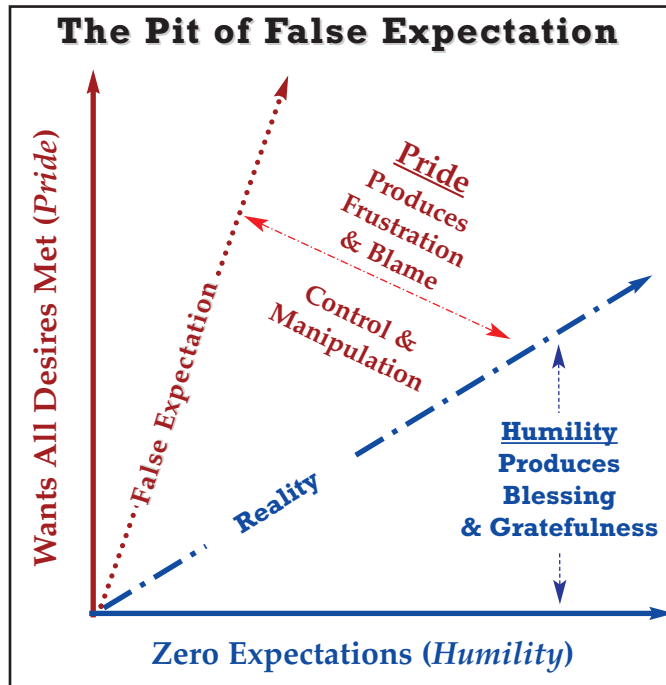
One of the facets of pride that many of us overlook is *false expectation*. You can recognize false expectation in a variety of ways:

- Expecting others to act more positively toward you.
- Comparing yourself to others.
- Desiring something other than what your Father has given you.
- Ungrateful for what our Father has done for you or given you.
- Finding yourself easily annoyed.

Look at the chart on the next page. The gap between Reality in life and False Expectation produces grievous results. Your attitudes fail to conform to the humility Jesus seeks in you, and you become susceptible to demonic influence. You may demand certain “hoops of behavior” that others have to jump through in order to please you.

A humble person’s lack of false expectation opens up him or her to discern blessing

even in sorrow and suffering. Their lives bespeak gratefulness in all areas, because they expected nothing. Consider these things as you go through your day.



- Describe the last time you were angered, disappointed, or hurt when someone failed to live up to your expectation. Did you feel let down? How did you respond to that person?
- When you look at the chart that pictures the Pit of False Expectation, where would you put yourself? How have you (or *have* you?) grown in humility toward the zone of Zero Expectations?