

Going to the High Places

Chapter 12 *In the Mist*



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Introduction

In this chapter we come face to face with the consequences of allowing our *passion* for our Shepherd to fade, to take second place in our hearts and minds. As focus on Him and His will decreases, the door of opportunity for deceptive voices squeaks open, allowing them to gain preeminence in our thoughts.

How vital it is that we leave no room for any other voice to influence us but that of the Holy Spirit!

As you join Much-Afraid in her journey through the mist, dig into the psalms of David. Time and again that shepherd-turned-king was assailed by doubts from within and assaults from without — yet he recognized that solace and strength come only from crying out in trust to his Lord.

That trust needs to be firmly in place as we continue our journey to the High Places. Your “mist” experience is preparing you for the fiery trials to come!

Chapter 12 *In the Mist*

1. At last the storm gradually died down...; 2. When they started...

Much-Afraid and her two companions have gratefully weathered the torrential storm safely sheltered in the cozy cabin. Perhaps you’ve been experiencing a breather yourself after facing a personal crisis that assaulted you or your family. You probably wish that that sense of peace could last longer. But chances are, our Father has other “**spiritual growth opportunities**” in store for you.

You may be experiencing some painful reminders of the cost to you thus far in your travels. Perhaps there are some formerly dear relationships that have turned away because of your zeal to follow in the Shepherd’s steps. Maybe you long for the phone to ring or the email to bring you news from those with whom you once shared friendship.

But your time in the mist is a preparation

period in which you need to confront any lingering doubts you have about the Lordship of your living Shepherd and your willingness to follow Him *anywhere* through *anything*. This time in the mist is a very necessary time of personal evaluation before you climb any further.

The Israelites of old could have shortened their desert experience by 38 years had they chosen to trust God without reservation. Yet they chose to make a presumptuous stand of disbelief at Kadesh Barnea (so near the border of Canaan!). They sent out twelve spies to see if the Promised Land was as good as the Lord had said. Then they believed the fear-based reports of the ten, shoving aside the faith-based trust of Caleb and Joshua.

For their disbelief they died in the barren sand. Not one of that adult generation would see the promise fulfilled. *Your* doubt in His faithfulness carries similar dire consequences!

- Describe a period in which you felt you were being called to give 100% for quite a while before the goal was reached. How did you respond when that effort was finally over?

3. She began to realize that...

Just as trees and vines pass through different seasons of rest, preparation and production, so do followers of Jesus in their life pilgrimage. After the joy of bearing fruit fit for harvest, a grapevine’s leaves are tattered, the branches straggly, and the entire plant in need of recuperation.

During the cold winter months the plant may actually appear dead, but the roots are still vibrant with potential life! If those roots decided on their own to send up shoots too early, a freeze would destroy the tender buds. That season of rest in the dark is vital for the health of the plant.

Much-Afraid had endured the thrill of the various trials she’d undergone so far. The new test, however, was quite different, call-

ing on her to continue to trust and love the Shepherd in the day-in, day-out trudge of the mist which blocked out the sun's warm penetration.

You've been through those times yourself when the thought, "Will this ever end?" insinuates itself into your attitude as well. Whether you're a mom with energetic toddlers or an employee with a demanding boss (or whatever your repetitive situation that never seems to change), our Father is presenting you with a classroom for **patient endurance** and **steadfast loving trust** to emerge with greater maturity in your character.

The real danger during this season is a grumbling, complaining heart that becomes sluggish in its trust. Beware!

*For God is not so unfair as to forget your work and the love you showed for Him in your past service for His people — and in your present service too. **However, we want each one of you to keep showing the same diligence right up to the end, when your hope will be realized, so that you will not become sluggish, but will be imitators of those who by their trust and patience are receiving what has been promised**" (Hebrews 6:10-12).*

- Would people who know you well describe you as a grumbler or complainer when trials come your way? When did you last grumble? About what?
- Do you find greater satisfaction when you're accomplishing something, even under pressure, than when you lose sight of God's purpose in your character development through tedious times?

4. At last she burst out...; 5. "No, it won't"...; 6. Much-Afraid pretended...

As soon as you entertain thoughts that

rail against your circumstances, you're voicing music to the enemy's ears! Words that Jesus would never say overtake your mind so convincingly that you begin to believe them. The same exaggeration of truth that Eve swallowed along with the fruit convinces you that God doesn't have your best interest at heart. In fact, you begin to suspect that you may *never* escape the drudgery that's so irritating you.

Redirect those complaints that issue from burgeoning resentment. Ask yourself if your Shepherd has ever failed you in any matter. Our great High Priest fully understands your present trial because He's been there! Jesus has been confronted with the temptation to grumble (though He never did), and He knows your weakness. But He continuously invites you to lift away your veil of mist and "*confidently approach the throne from which God gives grace, so that [you] may receive mercy and find grace in [your] time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

If you've ever flown any distance, you realize that even though you may be taking off in a fogbank, once the plane passes through the clouds you find yourself in brilliant sunlight. That doesn't mean that the sun didn't exist while you were on the ground; you just didn't *see* it from that perspective.

The writer of Ecclesiastes assures us that that "for everything there is a season" — and this season of mist, too, will pass. If you enter a new season of life with presuppositions of how long it will last, you're sure to be disappointed!

- Are you wearing down those around you by giving way to complaining thoughts?
- What circumstances are you facing right now that can become a catalyst for grumbling?

7. **“Have you noticed, Much-Afraid,” ...;**
8. **Much-Afraid had not...**

Sue: Mike and I have lived in 19 different homes during our years together. Some have been delightful, others more of a “roof over our heads” variety. But we have learned from our various relocations that our Father has very real purposes for each home, whether in what we’re able to accomplish there or the people we’re to encounter.

We’ve never been sure whether each season would last months or years. All that was understood was that our Father would make known when a new season was approaching.

When Mike and I returned to Connecticut to care for his invalid mother, we had no idea what that would entail on a daily basis nor how long our care for her in her home would last. But we sure learned to grasp onto our daily bread’s worth of grace and strength from Him!

We also discovered so much darkness lurking in the recesses of our hearts that popped up unexpectedly and horrifyingly to two people who had thought we were loving and compassionate! We can look back now and see how needful that period was in our character development in order to share with others that which our Shepherd wanted us to experience firsthand.

When you find yourself listening to voices of resentment, take those thoughts captive! Much-Afraid failed to exercise a discerning heart when she considered those malevolent thoughts. Resentment made very sure he didn’t mention the Shepherd’s name or His purposes and plans. By focusing Much-Afraid on her bleak circumstances, he succeeded in diverting her attention from love-grounded obedience to her Lord.

Don’t let circumstances dictate Who God is to you! If you bemoan that you don’t feel any progress in Christlike character or that you don’t see that your life is impacting anyone around you in a Godly way, you’re stuck in a “horizontal” reference framework. You’re disbelieving that our Lord can make the changes He desires as you yield to His

will. Then you begin to distrust that He’s even guiding you through His Spirit.

When those doubts beset you, call out to your Shepherd! Seek out someone mature in their trust in Him and *listen* to what they offer in counsel and testimony! Ask them about their own time “in the mist” and how our Lord delivered them. Find out what they learned about the importance of life experiences in which no progress seemed evident for a while.

Much-Afraid was blessed that her two companions didn’t coddle her doubts or smooth over her resentment. Instead, they redirected her to the faithfulness of the Shepherd and the unbending principle of staying on His path. That’s true ministry! They may well have been thinking of David’s comforting words: *“You keep me alive when surrounded by danger; You put out Your hand when my enemies rage; with Your right hand You save me. The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me”* (Psalm 138:7,8a).

You can’t keep your enemy from whispering thoughts of doubt and resentment. But you *can* take those thoughts captive and recognize that they aren’t emanating from the Holy Spirit!

- How can you catch yourself when you’re about to give way to grumbling? What Bible verses are especially helpful to you?
- Who in your life is effective in confronting your shortsightedness and turning you back to wholehearted trust in your Shepherd?

9. **“But,” persisted Much-Afraid...;** 10. **Their only answer was...;** 11. **Sorrow and Suffering took...;** 12. **To this they replied...**

A little wedge of resentment lodged itself firmly in Much-Afraid, inviting another “unJesus” voice to attach itself like poison

oak around her mind. And not being content to moan alone, she tried to get her two companions to take up her plaint against the Shepherd.

Have you ever noticed what a predictable tactic that is? People who are resentful and bitter want you to take their side, even if you've never had reason to resent the one against whom they're bitter! It's as though your agreement will justify their right to carry such an ugly weight.

At any time Much-Afraid could have stopped those voices by recalling the faithfulness of the Shepherd and His unfailing love. If she'd crawled out of her own *self-imposed gloom* she would have perceived that the mere presence of her companions fore and aft were testimony of her Shepherd's kindness to her on the journey. Instead, she chose to gnaw on the gristle of discontent.

Do you ever find yourself so entrenched in your own perceptions that you don't have room in your mind for the facts? Sorrow and Suffering were so unshakably confident in the One Who had directed them that, even if they *were* going in circles, their hearts were at rest.

- How do you respond when you're on the receiving end of someone else's grumbling or voiced resentment against a third party?
- Do you ever use others as a sounding board for your discontent or bitterness because you're reluctant to go to God, knowing that He will cause you to be accountable and stir you to repent? When is the last time you sounded off at another person to vent your resentful feelings?

13. "You poor little thing"...; 14. So they went on...

"If I were in charge, things would be dif-

ferent!" Have you ever felt that way, wondering why someone who is as incompetent or unfeeling as _____ (fill in the blank) has authority in your life?

And look at the button Self-Pity pushes: wasted time, fruitlessness! We Americans are so time-conscious, probably because we feel we have so little of it. But restructure that thought according to our Father's purposes. If your priorities overlap His, you do have enough time to live fully without waste. He is a God of order.

If you're frantic, He didn't put it there; *you* did, by pursuing your own motivations and goals. It's all too easy to get sucked into obligations and activities that our Father hasn't earmarked for you, your spouse or your family.

STOP before you agree to another meeting, program, or invitation. Heed the life-giving injunction: "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46:10). You can't refresh your heart with His loving presence unless you quiet your thoughts and focus on His loving sovereignty.

The perceived quality of fruit is not determined by the tree's opinion but by the taster. Your fruitfulness matters to the One Who is producing it in and through you *for His pleasure!* Never measure your fruit by the lives of others. It's only by His grace that they're bearing Kingdom fruit at all! Straining to *be* or to *do* or to *have* beyond what our Shepherd has for you yields grumbling, thanklessness and a restless heart.

- How do you occupy your time when you're not meeting obligations or someone else's needs? Do you find restorative refreshment in what you choose to do in your moments of discretionary time?

- Against whom do you most often harbor resentful thoughts about the way in which he/she exercises authority? Have you taken those thoughts captive, then asked forgive-

ness of that person for not being there for them with the right heart and attitude?

15. Suffering doggedly led the way...

You may have decided all along that there was no turning back on your journey to the High Places, but your *attitude* can make everyone else traveling with you miserable. Jesus, the heart circumciser, is dealing with your love for Him and your obedient trust in His ways of deepening that love.

You, on the other hand, are complaining inwardly (or outwardly) so much that your very presence can be annoying to those who have to be around you! No wonder the mist seemed to get “thicker and colder and drearier than ever” for Much-Afraid. She recognized that she was responding from her old flesh nature, yet she continued to wallow in her emotional mud.

Sue: It’s all too easy for us women to blame our hormones (or lack of them, for some of us!) for our irritability or unkind responses. But our Creator knows our weakness in this area as well, and wants us to call upon Him for His Spirit to work in us so that we don’t lash out at others.

How many times has your husband (or boss or friend) had to take a deep apprehensive breath before confronting you about your attitude or behavior? Much-Afraid’s slipping and stumbling are as uncomfortable for her companions as for herself. But, her stubborn refusal to trust the Shepherd’s way has brought this on her.

Don’t expect anyone else to cater to your rebellion and inner turmoil. That’s manipulation — using behavior to control others. The Bible refers to it as sorcery, and you sure don’t want to suffer the consequences of that! (See 1 Samuel 15 for the sorry tale of Saul’s deceptive rationale that led to rebellion and opened the door for

sorcery in his life.)

Each of us needs family in Jesus who are steadfast in their trust and purpose in Him. Their example as well as their witness testify to how much we need our Lord’s perspective. That’s why the apostle Paul can exhort the believers at Philippi to do everything without complaining or arguing (see Philippians 2:14), so that their lives will shine like stars in the midst of their perverse, sin-grubby society. Go and do likewise!

- What thoughts lure you the most when your life is “unspeakably tame” and seemingly purposeless?
- If you are a woman, when did you last take advantage of your monthly cycle to exercise manipulation or control by your attitude or words? Have you asked forgiveness from those you violated because of this?

16. At last, one afternoon...; 17. It has not been mentioned...; 18. It was not pleasant to think...

Why do we, like Much-Afraid, wait so long to express our trust in our Shepherd? Regardless of the quality of our voices, the Holy Spirit yearns to stir us to lift praise and delight to our Father!

When David spent day after day watching his woolly charges graze, he may have hoped at times that his future would hold more for him than this. But during these “treadmill times” he also composed some of the most comforting songs of praise that have ever been recorded. Dig out your concordance and notice how often references to songs and singing appear!

When you sing to our Lord, not only do His ears take delight, but your heart grows warm as well when your song is from your spirit! By turning her heart

toward the One Who is life, Much-Afraid chases away the tormenting voices of Resentment, Self-Pity and Bitterness. As her hope is fleshed out in song, her jubilation soars!

Sue: Certain songs never fail to bring me to tears of gratefulness for my Savior and His love. Just the thought of someday seeing Jesus face to face and awaiting a **“Well done, My faithful one”** stirs me to keep pressing on in His love and His purposes, even on the days when I’m ready to scream, **“ANYTIME NOW!!”**

Keep in mind the strength you draw from calling upon His Spirit within to sing through you to the Throne of mercy. Come before Him with a song in your heart each morning before stress can overtake you, and each evening so that He’s the last One your thoughts rest on before you sleep. (See Psalm 92:1,2).

- Has anyone ever made fun of your singing voice to the extent that you rarely sing around others?
- Has the Holy Spirit ever given you lyrics or a tune you’ve never heard before that keeps coming back to you? Have you written the words down so you’ll have them as a special gift from Him to share when appropriate?

19. “Why, Much-Afraid”...; 20. There, striding toward her...; 21. “O Shepherd”...

Did you notice that at the time Much-Afraid chose to begin to express trust in the promises of the Shepherd, the mist had not yet broken? She didn’t sing because everything was cheery; rather, she sang in spite of the mist! And just at that point of expressed trust, the Shepherd made His appearance — and the mist rapidly cleared away.

What can we learn from this experience?

Well, we know that even a “mustard seed” of hope in the great Promise Keeper dispels the irritating voices that try to confound our trust. And, we see that Much-Afraid’s song was actually a recitation of Scripture that she’d previously heard from her companion Sorrow. As well, we see that a praise song directed to our Lord dispels mist-like confusion and refreshes our hearts.

The Psalms overflow with text that was originally designed to be set to music. Think of how many of these writings begin with “To the tune of...”, or declare the exhortation, “Sing to the Lord”! There’s a wonderful healing power when we lift our voices in melodies to our Lord, especially since only mankind has been equipped in our Creator’s image to set words to music!

We can learn a lot about offering to our Lord “new songs” by listening to children when they’re unaware of being overheard. Many times you’ll hear them pipe up with all sorts of jingles set to tunes they may have never heard before. And what a teachable moment for you to take even familiar melodies and fit Scripture verses to them to learn as a family!

Sue: I recently came across a simple song that powerfully summed up the goal of our pilgrimage to the High Places. Notice that there’s nothing complicated or intricate in the words — just scriptural truth in singable form. As you read it, see if a tune comes to your heart to make it personal!

I Want To Walk As A Child Of The Light

I want to walk as a child of the light,
I want to follow Jesus.
God set the stars to give light to the world
The star of my life is Jesus.

In Him there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light in the city of God,
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

I want to see the brightness of God,
I want to look at Jesus.

Clear Son of righteousness shine on my path
And show me the way to the Father.

I'm looking for the coming of Christ,
I want to be with Jesus.
When we have run with patience the race
We shall know the joy of Jesus.
(©1970 Kathleen Thomerson/Celebration)

Even in your loneliest, darkest hours, if a hymn or Scripture song comes to you, sing it! The Spirit can use that spark of trust in our Shepherd to bring light into your sorrowful situation and melt the gloom with hope.

- Dig up some of those special songs that so blessed you in your early walk with our Lord. Share them with someone close to you and talk about why they were so meaningful to you at that time.
- Ask our Lord to put a new song into your heart as you pray and search His Word. Then share that gift with those in your faith family.

22. "Tell me,"...; 23. "Sorrow taught it to me"...; 24. "I am glad you sing it"...

Scripture tells us that our Lord will rejoice over the city from which He will rule, Jerusalem. How much more will He rejoice over you as His Bride! The prophet Zephaniah must have been thrilled when he wrote about Jerusalem (and about all who belong to the coming King!), "*Sing, O Daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! ...The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will*

rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:14,17).

That promise yet to be fulfilled is plenty of reason to sing and shout! There are no promises that He will withhold from those who love Him and are called His own!

Much-Afraid still focuses with shame on her own shortcomings and weaknesses — her "bedraggled and muddy condition". She still hasn't realized the *love* which filters the way the Shepherd sees her.

Are *you* bogged down by the pain of past regret and failures? Cry out now to Jesus for a *passion* for Him and for that which He yearns to bring about in and through you! He's viewing you with eyes of grace because He knows already what He can accomplish in your heart as you continue to yield to His will.

- Have you forgotten your Shepherd's joy in you even as you struggle to put one foot of faith in front of the other? Pause here to refresh your passion in the Person of Jesus your Lord. Breathe in once again His intense love for you, even as weak as you might see yourself.
- What "crooked feet" from your past keep you from seeing yourself with His eyes of love? Are you willing to place these regrets and pain at the foot of His Cross so that you can be made whole and new in Him?

25. "O Shepherd," exclaimed Much-Afraid...; 26. Again he smiled...; 27. Poor Much-Afraid...; 28. "Much-Afraid," said he very gently...

How do you respond when a brother or sister in Jesus who is close to you speaks with you about an area in which you're stumbling? Before you jump all over that person and hotly defend yourself, remember this: "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend*"

(Proverbs 27:6, KJV), and “*Better open rebuke than hidden love*” (Proverbs 27:5).

It takes loving courage to approach someone you care about in order to help them make a “course correction” in their journey — a change from an area of darkness to a step of light. Yet in this “**anything goes**” culture, any correction is seen as “**judgmental**” or “**intolerant**”.

But note Paul’s call to his younger protégé Timothy to proclaim God’s Word in order to “*convict, censure and exhort with unfailing patience and with teaching*” (2 Timothy 4:2). Righteousness is right even if it’s painful to receive! (And Paul also reminds Timothy to walk the talk himself so that no charge of hypocrisy can be leveled at him!)

Surely we’re living in a time in which people “cater to their passions” and stop listening to the truth. But ignorance is no excuse before our Father! A true friend in Jesus sees beyond the present moment of discomfort to redirect his brother or sister toward the One Whose way brings life, peace and joy.

Much-Afraid “flushed painfully” because she knew the Shepherd had noticed her slipping and stumbling. He never denied that she indeed had “stains and defilements”. But His gentle response emanated from a heart that loved her enough to *confront the truth* of her present condition. Then He steered her to the greater goal that lay ahead, being *with Him* and skipping and leaping on the High Places.

Sue: I can get so caught up in doing work that I forget that the Kingdom of God is *people* who are more important than tasks. When Mike or others close to me have confronted me with correction, I’ve sometimes reacted as though they’d called me a failure (which wasn’t the case at all!). But they’ve seen through a blind spot and loved me enough to point out that area to help me find the joy of walking in a way that pleases our Father. And from our Father’s perspective, we haven’t “failed”; we’ve just slipped by a truth that He’s wanted to correct.

As you pray for your family in Jesus, remember that *you* may be the heart and mouth that our Lord chooses to use as His messenger of loving course correction!

- When was the last time someone who cared about you offered a “course correction” for your life to help guide you back into righteousness in a particular area?
- When was the last time you responded to the Spirit’s nudge and confronted with a right heart a brother or sister in sin?
- How do you react when someone does make known an area in which you’ve strayed off the path of righteous living? Are you willing to ask forgiveness for those you’ve “jumped” when they’ve spoken to you out of loving concern?

29. “Yes,” said Much-Afraid thankfully...; 30. By this time the mist...; 31. “Did you really think” ...; 32. She looked at him sorrowfully...

What calm and peace permeates our hearts when we turn with humility to the Lamb Who so loves us! Much-Afraid chose to rest and rejoice in the Shepherd’s presence, noticing and basking in the sparkling reflection of the dripping leaves. She’d finally stopped being consumed by the **tyranny of self** that had blinded her to the beauty around her.

She realized that doubting Him had led to her downward spiral of listening to, then believing, the deceptive voices of Resentment and the others. The Shepherd’s quiet question to her about His intervention could be summed up by King David:

The Lord supports all who fall and lifts up all who are bent over... The Lord is close to all who call on Him, to all who sincerely call on Him. He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them. The Lord protects all who love Him, but all the wicked He destroys (Psalm 145:14,18-20, CJB).

See your circumstances with the eyes of your spirit! The Shepherd is pointing you forward in hope, lifting the weight of your daily burdens as you trust that you're on the path He's set before you. When you begin to doubt that His sovereign power and love are able to keep you from straying without warning, those demonic voices are sure to once again begin their insidious whispering.

When the mist starts to encompass you, think of yourself as a small child during the night. Those fears that beset you when your bedroom light was off were just an illusion. When Dad turned the light on, you realized you really had been safe all along. And when you turn your heart away from the besetting voices and focus on the Light, your dragon-like trials will lose their teeth.

- Do you really believe in your heart that our Shepherd won't let you go astray without first warning you? What sort of warnings do you think He's referring to?
- What experience can you relate in which you purposely ignored warnings and chose to stray off His path of right living? What turned you back to following His way?

33. "You had better become a singer"...; 34. She looked at him earnestly...; 35. "I never could have managed"...

Sue: Mike and I have been so blessed along our journey to have **loadbearing rela-**

tionships in which we were free to speak with love into each other's lives. Passing through painful valleys with others who are committed to one-anothering deepens our trust in His faithfulness to set us back on the right path again.

When you've tasted some of life's bitter waters and found healing at the hands of companions He's drawn alongside you for a specific season, you're equipped to pass along the fruit of those relationships with others.

Years ago, the so-called "Shepherding Movement" tore the spiritual confidence of many. Self-determined "shepherds" put themselves in authority over individuals and exercised control in such a way that they fulfilled Much-Afraid's earlier fear: They *did* "drag people along without caring how they felt" as human beings and as followers of Jesus.

This highhanded approach of control did grave injustice to the biblical role of true elders called by our Father to lead as shepherds with *wisdom* and *compassion* for the sheep. By the time true shepherds reach spiritual maturity, they themselves have experienced the tender mercies of our Father in their own missteps. They've been equipped by His grace to come alongside the faltering with our Father's heart.

Much-Afraid was grateful that her companions weren't just following "the commandment which you have given them", but were truly eager to help her reach the High Places. What a difference between those who may occupy space around you in a congregational setting but never invite you into their homes, and those who are committed as extended spiritual family in Jesus with you! The former are "positional relationships" because you happen to be at the same place doing the same thing. But the latter have been threaded into your life fabric by the Spirit!

Committed family in Jesus rejoice with each other as lives are changed from worldliness to Christ-likeness. They understand the mutual encouragement and loving

responsibility to help each other press on to the High Places of Christ's character.

Maybe you feel that you don't have time to commit to come alongside a few others as extended spiritual family. Ask our Lord for His heart and the discernment to recognize those He does want you joined with in a deeper way. As you follow His lead as a family, He'll help you reprioritize your activities and hours to align with His purposes.

- Who are the companions in your life who are helping you to further reflect the character of Jesus? Who are *you* helping to walk more boldly along the Shepherd's path?
- Have you ever been spiritually abused by someone who misused your trust? How did that experience affect subsequent relationships?

36. As she finished speaking...; 37. They were sitting apart...; 38. There was something almost indescribably majestic...

No wonder Sorrow and Suffering are laughing at this point! They fully understand that which Much-Afraid is just beginning to grasp: As the young woman decides to turn from her doubts and unbelief, she finds ever-more secure footing in the Shepherd's faithfulness and power! The limping little soldier is learning that yielded willingness is key to a growing maturity that can pierce mists and shadows.

Only a pilgrim who has been tried and tested yet has responded with a yielded heart can make the leap from baleful resignation over circumstances to *joyful gratefulness for His faithfulness!* We may not have control over the things that come at us, but we *can* develop our Lord's perspective on them.

Once again the Book of Psalms puts into

words the attitude our Father is trying to develop in us through our trials:

*Before I was humbled I used to go astray; but now I observe Your word. You **are good**, and you **do good**; teach me your laws....It was for **my good** that I have been humbled; it was so that I would learn Your laws (Psalm 119:67,68,71).*

- The Psalmist understands the basic goodness of God in both His Person and His ways, even when He humbles us. Recount a situation in which you were humbled for your good.
- In what ways was your character changed because of this humbling circumstance?

39. The Shepherd watched them...; 40. Sorrow and Suffering dropped the veils...; 41. The laughter died out...; 42. She looked at him...

It's all too easy to *say* that you love Jesus, yet live in a way that sets up a personal defense against actually *trusting* Him. Trust means that you *know* Him in your spirit, and that *He* knows *you*. You and He are intricately connected in love, the devoted self-sacrifice that willingly yields to His will and purposes just as Jesus does with His Father.

Keeping one foot in the camp of approval by others as an insurance policy against a new path to which He may be calling you is *not* trust! Our prophetic forebears who loved and served God didn't ask to be set apart to proclaim His messages. But they yielded to His will and were found faithful to follow through as His heart and mouth — usually at great personal cost!

The question the Shepherd poses to Much-Afraid as to whether her love is willing to trust Him completely is a poignant

query for each of us. *He* knows that His arms can uphold you in every trial, but are *you* willing to trust that? Much-Afraid responds self-deprecatingly about her *desire* to love, even with her “cold little heart.” But she already knew that His question was leading to the reality of a new test coming her way. She was already fearfully anticipating the trial to come more than she was focusing on the faithful Shepherd standing with her.

- Offer evidence from your own life choices that you understand the difference between *saying* you love God and actually following Him in *trust*.
- Who would be the people from whom you’d most likely seek approval before stepping out in faith to follow the Shepherd? Do their lives reflect the victory of righteousness and answered prayer? Or, are they those who are reluctant to leave fruitlessness behind?

43. “Would you be willing to trust me”...; 44. She looked at him...; 45. “O Shepherd,” she implored...

Much-Afraid’s rock-solid trust that the Shepherd cannot lie is a firm foundation for her willingness (if not eagerness) to undergo whatever is necessary to reach the High Places. She has endured so much up to this point, and can repeat in her heart with the same conviction as the psalmist:

I will go on walking in the presence of the Lord in the lands of the living. I will keep on trusting even when I say, “I am utterly miserable,” even when, in my panic, I declare, “Everything human is deceptive” (Psalm 116:9-11).

Sue: I can identify with Much-Afraid’s doubts at times. I *know* Whom I’ve believed,

but I also know my own frailties. How grateful I am that my Savior is so willing to forgive my weaknesses when I call upon Him in trust! Many times I’ve camped on promises such as these:

“Because [she] loves Me, I will rescue [her]; because [she] knows My name, I will protect [her]. [She] will call on Me and I will answer [her]. I will be with [her] when [she] is in trouble” (Psalm 91:14,15).

(Sometimes it’s helpful to put *yourself* into those promises, even inserting your own name, just to make sure you know He’s speaking to you!)

- Through what particular test might the Shepherd pass you that might cause you to doubt that it came from Him?
- Have you ever undergone a test from our Lord that others said *couldn’t* have come from Him? How did you respond while you were going through it? What change came about in you to confirm in your heart that this trial was indeed intended by our Father to produce righteous fruit in your character?

46. He said nothing...; 47. It was then her turn...; 48. Suddenly she burst into a passion of weeping...

Much-Afraid’s response to the profound thought that she might truly be deceived by the Shepherd evokes a flood of passionate tears. She didn’t pause to weigh the pros and cons of loving and serving the Shepherd. Instead, her heart propelled her to trust Him no matter what circumstances confronted her.

She was willing to be deceived, if that were possible. Her very existence depended

on loving Him. She was no longer looking for His *hand* to meet her needs. She looked straight into His *face*, declaring her whole life to be His. As with the young shepherd David, she could declare with passion, *"I love You, Lord, my strength,...my Rock, my fortress and deliverer, my God, my Rock in whom I find shelter, my shield, the power that saves me, my stronghold"* (Psalm 18:1,2).

That's the kind of loving trust that places one foot in front of the other, regardless of where the path leads!

- If your heart and spirit trust Jesus, can you ever "lose Him"?

- When have you ever been deceived by the enemy into thinking that you've lost Jesus' love? How was your trust in His love restored?

49. He laid his hands on her head...; 50. Much-Afraid picked up a little icy-cold pebble...

Another pebble, this one icy-cold, joins the other stones of remembrance in Much-Afraid's small bag. She knows that the next test will be the most severe yet, even from the hand of the One most tender.

Perhaps you've encountered people who declare that tests and trials come only from Satan, that God doesn't test "New Testament saints." (That's one of many "false gospels" abounding in the Western church in particular.) The apostle Peter, a man who tasted the cup of suffering often, would differ with that concept. He assures us that our Father tests the gold of our trust in order to prove that it's genuine and praiseworthy, fit for the King. (See 1 Peter 1:6,7.)

Our Lord has proven Himself to be faithful in every custom-tailored trial we've ever encountered. Don't forget the lessons you've

learned through each season of suffering. These have been opportunities to grow in **perseverance, character, and especially, hope**. It's *our* hope that, as you prepare yourself for whatever comes next to strengthen your love and trust, you will be quick to cry out to our Shepherd to sustain you through it until that which He needs to accomplish in and through you is fulfilled!