

**January 13, 2011**

## **Take A Lesson From Much-Afraid**

We hope that somewhere in your life journey in Jesus you've read Hannah Hurnard's prophetic book, *Hinds' Feet on High Places*. And, if you haven't done so already, we highly recommend that you discuss and put into practice the lessons from our study guide for the book, *Going to the High Places*. The family name of Much-Afraid, the main character, was "Fearing," and she resided with her Fearing relatives in the toxic "Valley of Humiliation." Nothing changed in her dreary and purposeless life until she accepted the invitation of the Shepherd to journey to the High Places. Only there could she be rid of the limitations of her human capacity for love and be filled with holy and boundless love by the Shepherd.

In light of our recent learning about toxic memories, we can see that her journey to the High Places was actually a pilgrimage of *detoxification*. As Much-Afraid departed the Valley of Humiliation, the Shepherd gave her two traveling companions, Sorrow and Suffering. Like many of us who resist our Father's perspective on what *seems bad* in our lives, Much-Afraid had to journey quite a ways before she was willing to embrace the help of Sorrow and Suffering. Only after her fear-based thoughts and memories were replaced with trust in the Shepherd and in His chosen traveling companions for her could she be changed into a loving, selfless vessel the Shepherd could use.

The allegory chronicles Much-Afraid's progress of detoxification, culminating in her arrival on the High Places. It's there that she's renamed *Grace and Glory*, filled with the love for others that ONLY the Shepherd can give. At that point, she, like all of us who've embraced our Shepherd's ways of detoxifying our mind, will and emotions, is able to perceive the true identity of Sorrow and Suffering: *Joy and Peace*.

When viewed through the love of Jesus at work in us, every person around us and every memory within our minds becomes different to us. We're no longer held captive to our old negative way of perceiving others. Look at the change in Much-Afraid. After being detoxified, Grace and Glory

"discovered that her feelings toward her relatives who lived down there in the Valley of Humiliation had undergone a complete change, and she saw they were just miserable beings such as she had been herself. They were indwelt and tormented by their own besetting sins and ugly natures [toxic memories], just as she had been by her own fears... If the Shepherd could deliver me from all my fears and sins, couldn't he deliver them also from the things which torment them?"

Again, we strongly encourage you to read *Hinds' Feet* and use the study guide as a way of exposing any areas of toxic resistance to Christ-like development that may be in you. Even if you read it years ago, you'll benefit greatly from revisiting this material to make sure no toxic memories are hindering our Lord's purposes for your life. Glean from Much-Afraid's pilgrimage of sanctification and consider how her journey may give you

insight into steps you must take in your own sanctification (detoxification) in order to be fully yielded to the Spirit of Christ in you.

***"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise."  
"[T]he pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel."  
(Proverbs 15:31;27:9)***

As Scripture repeatedly cites, our Shepherd knows how essential it is that each of us has godly companions on our pilgrimage of replacing toxic memories. Be advised that you won't change on your own! The perverse "comfort zone" of giving way to the toxic influence of old memory patterns is all-too-familiar to you. And change can be perceived as threatening, both to you and to those who are comfortable with you the way you are.

We noted in Lifebyte 73 that our own "detoxification" came about because we were willing to receive input from each other and from others whom we trusted. *Open willingness* to receive and heed rebuke and correction is vital, so vital that you won't change if you refuse to seek it. Mike owned up that he vividly "saw red" when our friend Exie asked him about a particular deep-seated hurt in his heart. But if she *hadn't* exposed that toxic pain and if our Lord *hadn't* subsequently healed him, he would have gone on robbing Sue of the love Jesus wanted to give her through Mike.

We can look back now and see so many people we've encountered who haven't yet been transformed into "Grace and Glory". They aren't experiencing the love which only Jesus can give because, buried within their minds and hearts, they're afflicted with *unresolved bitterness toward God*. If you're among those who are pretending to be "spiritual" but distrust our Father in His work in and around you, you're hurting yourself by living a lie. Maybe you've been afraid to face the fact that in His sovereignty He *allowed* you to grow up in an abusive alcoholic home, or to be a self-rejecting child of divorced parents, or to be conceived out of wedlock or given up for adoption, or whatever has caused your toxic memories to form and be implanted within you.

Any of these traumatic circumstances has caused you to *not trust our Lord as He deserves*. Every painful experience and letdown has in fact stirred you to distrust Him even more. If you're honest with yourself, you'll admit you hear within you a small but compelling whisper, "I'll trust Him *just so far*." But how tragic for you! Without complete trust in the One Who created you and loved you before you were born, you'll never recognize Sorrow and Suffering for whom He meant them to be — His means to fashion Joy and Peace in you. As long as you refuse to bring before God your hurt and distrust toward Him, you'll go on living in the Valley of your choosing—be it bitterness, fear, humiliation, rejection.

Your own "Sorrow and Suffering" aren't confined to just the past events which have become toxic memories. Sorrow and Suffering can be your spouse, your children, or your close friends, any whom you fail to trust when they confront you about your toxic

thoughts and memories. Until you fully trust your sovereign Lord the way Much-Afraid had to learn on her journey, you will never trust the companions He has specifically put in place for you. And your lack of trust only makes the journey that much more difficult, as Much-Afraid discovered early along her way.

### **Trust As Small As A Dog's**

This morning the Holy Spirit reminded us of an example of trust through an event that took place about 35 years ago. We hope it will minister to those of you who recognize that you do have trouble trusting.

When we were in our twenties, our best friends were an older couple, Clyde and Betty, who were in their fifties. We'd often go with them to their cabin in the mountains east of San Diego. During that time they acquired a German Shepherd pup they named Rhiner. When Rhiner was about four months old we took him on an extra long hike on a sparkling winter's day. As we began our return trip to the cabin, however, Rhiner collapsed in a heap. Exhausted, he refused to budge.

Finally, after coaxing produced no effect, Mike tucked the pup inside his coat, his furry head resting under Mike's chin. Totally relaxed, Rhiner dozed as we trekked the miles back to the cabin. But something transpired in the pup's attitude toward Mike afterward. Every time he saw Mike he wouldn't leave his side! It was like he'd developed a deep heart-attachment during his long carry back.

About a year later we went backpacking in the Sierra Mountains for a week with Clyde and two teenage boys. Rhiner came along carrying his own backpack with the cooking pots and dog food. On the second day out, deep into the mountains, Rhiner headed off on his own from our campsite. When he returned, his whole face, tongue and nose, were filled with a hundred porcupine quills. We realized we needed to get the quills out right away. He couldn't even drink, and he was obviously uncomfortable.

Mike disinfected the pliers we'd brought along. As Clyde and Sue held Rhiner down, Mike removed the first ten quills then let the dog get up. Each quill emerged with a yelp of awful pain! After a few minutes reprieve, Clyde and Sue held him down again as Mike pulled out another ten quills. Then the dog was allowed to get up and walk around a bit. But then something startling happened: Rhiner came back to Mike on his own and laid down for the next ten to be extracted. This cycle repeated itself until all the quills were pulled.

Even in the face of severe pain, the dog trusted that what Mike was doing had to be done. We recognized his trust because after each 10-quill removal, he'd return to Mike and lay down for the next round. That night as we were getting into our sleeping bags, Rhiner began to shake uncontrollably. Once again he crawled over to Mike, who took him into his sleeping bag and held him throughout the night (a lot like carrying the pup in

his jacket just a year earlier). Sometime during the night his trembling abated and both dog and man fell asleep. Thankfully Rhiner fully recovered.

The dog's unwavering confidence typifies the trust we all need, first in our Lord, and then in at least one other person who knows us and can love us enough to identify and help us face the emotional pain of detoxifying our memories. That kind of penetrating and responsive relationship is what we call *load-bearing* (Galatians 6:2.) As with the pain-inducing quills in the dog, our goal was not to just get the quills out, but to *restore him to full health*. Your goal in replacing toxic memories must be to *become more like Jesus* through yielding to His Spirit's work in you. Anything short of the goal of Christ-like transformation will be a meaningless, painful struggle. But you don't need to *struggle* for Him to work in you! If you'll quiet your mind long enough in the face of painful thoughts and memories, you'll hear His still, quiet voice encouraging and strengthening you. *That's when you can take each thought and/or memory captive and make it obedient to Christ.*

***"The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does"*** (James 1:25)

If you're married but you know that you don't have Rhiner's kind of trust in your spouse, your marriage is grounded on emotional darkness. Commit with your spouse to make Jesus and how He would act if He were you the goal of your marriage. This really is possible—and it's Father's will for you both! As the apostle who so deeply understood Christ's forgiving love commanded, ***"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins"*** (1Peter 4:8). Gently confront the toxic memories in each of you as partners in a common cause—Christ's character. See one another from Father's perspective, not finger-pointing but bent on *bringing His healing* to each other. If you're not married, cry out to Him for a load-bearing friend who will be as committed as you are to becoming more Christ-like in love and character and motive and purpose.

We want to share an insight with you parents. If you realize that you *don't* have complete and absolute trust in God; and if you *don't* have the goal of making your marriage shine with the character of Jesus; and if you *don't* trust each other to help you change your mind's toxicity: Beware! You'll view raising your children more like a *project* than a *loving privilege and responsibility* to our Lord. You'll regard the times you must correct them as irritations rather than as character correction. Or, you'll give way and dote on them, ignoring their wrongdoing and avoiding the correction they need, thereby reinforcing their rebellious sin nature.

For all of you adults: If you *don't* have complete and absolute trust in God; and if you *don't* have a mutual goal with at least one other person to press on in your life journey to shine with the character of Jesus; and if you *don't* have someone who can bear the load with you to help you change your mind's toxicity: Then your mind will be dominated by

**OBSESSION.** Obsessive thoughts and behavior increase whenever you're beset by emotional hurt. Buried emotional pain feeds obsession. You limit your focus to things that are done *your way*. Sadly, it's like viewing life through a toilet paper roll. How limiting when *your perspective* is the only one you hold valid!

An obsessed person's mind is so dominated by their own perspective that they're unaware of the emotional needs of people around them. In other words, obsession is an ungodly focus on someone or something that *overrides any other consideration*. All the while, more important matters and people are excluded.

How would you describe someone who is obsessed?

- A person who is never fully satisfied with how others do things.
- A person who is never fully satisfied with how *he or she* does things.
- A person who must text or answer a cell phone while others are present.
- A person who heeds his/her thoughts more than the counsel of others.
- A person who is easily annoyed when things don't go their way.
- A person who doesn't see the good that God is doing around them.
- A person whose cup is always "half-empty."
- A person who pursues pleasure and financial security at the cost of others.
- (Fill in your own description)

Years ago Sue discovered the following passage in the apocryphal writings. It describes the nature of someone who has the *heart and mind of Jesus* toward others—a person who places the interests of others first (Philippians 2:3,4).

*"Though a man may be wise, if his words are rejected he will be deprived of all enjoyment. When a man is wise to his own advantage, the fruits of his knowledge are seen in his own person; **when a man is wise to his people's advantage, the fruits of his knowledge are enduring.** One wise for himself has full enjoyment, and all who see him praise him; **one wise for his people wins a heritage of glory, and his name endures forever.**" (Ecclesiasticus 37:20-22, 24,25).*

Wisdom that is used on your own behalf benefits you. But how much greater is wisdom that blesses many! Their lives are changed by what you share, and what they've learned from you can be passed along for generations to come as an enduring legacy. As we've cited many times, wisdom is seeing everything from God's point of view. Keep this understanding in the forefront of your heart, both as you reflect on your past *and* as you consider how He would have you meet the needs of those around you. If you are to authentically reflect Jesus as your Living Lord and King, you must put others first. YOU are His heart and hands and feet among your own relational realm!

As it pertains to detoxifying your mind, we leave you with these glorious words of Dr. Martin Luther King: *Free at last, free at last, I thank God I'm free at last!*

Your servants in seeing His Kingdom come,  
**Mike & Sue**

