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## **Christ-like Transformation: *Going To The High Places***

A number of years ago we prepared a study guide, *Going to the High Places*, which is based on Hannah Hurnard's classic, *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, to reveal various hurdles each of us must leap if we're to grow in the love and character of Jesus. If you haven't gone through it with someone close to you, you've missed a valuable tool in growing a Christ-like relationship with each other. We've observed that many Christians are lazy or apathetic in pursuing the character changes Father wants to bring about in them. Even fewer Christians cooperate *together* to be transformed for His Kingdom purposes. Hence we produced *Going to the High Places*.

Let's review several points from both the book and our study guide so you can discern some of the difficulties you'll encounter if you choose to discard "religion" and practice a Kingdom way of life in Christ. The main character, Much Afraid, lives in quiet desperation in the Valley of Humiliation, yearning to experience genuine love. (We refer to her abode as "The Valley of Strongholds.") The Shepherd from the mountains invites her to leave the Valley and journey to the High Places if she wants to encounter the love only He can give. He knows, however, that love is only part of the entire transformation she needs to find wholeness.

There hasn't been a person we've met, including ourselves in the past, whose family, close friends and religious relationships weren't held together by demonic strongholds! People seem most attracted to those who are beset by the same prevalent stronghold, be it rejection, fear and insecurity, bitterness or whatever. But to overcome this demonic agitation, you need a greater hunger for Jesus as your Lord than you do for the approval of others who share the same demonic influence as you. (See Matthew 10:35-39.)

The vast majority of marriages and close Christian relationships stop right at the edge of the Valley of Their Strongholds. Most often one partner refuses to leave behind the familiarity of the strongholds on which they've based their relationships, so the other person caves in as well. Their spiritual life slips gradually into religious complacency, bereft of any purpose that would have Kingdom significance.

You need determination and conviction to want to leave the familiar valley of emotional and spiritual darkness so you can begin an unknown journey. It takes Much Afraid three chapters before she even arrives at the outer edge of the valley to begin her ascent to the High Places. But at that point the Shepherd gives her two companions for her journey of transformation: "Sorrow" and "Suffering." Like most of us, during the initial stages of the odyssey Much Afraid resists the help of her two unwanted escorts. But over time she learns how wonderful it is to lean on them in her weakness. When she finally reaches the High Places, the two reveal their true identity as "Joy" and "Peace" — the same discovery we all make about sorrow and suffering as we proceed along our

own life journey of transformation in Jesus.

In your ongoing transformation, those close to you such as your spouse or dear friends will probably need to serve as sorrow or suffering for you. They'll need loving boldness to point out dark, hidden areas in you about which you may have deceived yourself.

In our Hebraic Article, *Mutually Growing Christ-like Relationships*, we emphasize two conditions that are needed for pressing on with others to become more like Jesus:

- ***a wholehearted desire to be transformed into the character of our Lord Jesus.***
- ***a humble willingness to receive biblically-based constructive criticism from those who deeply care about you.***

The journey for Much Afraid isn't easy. As she leaves the Valley of Humiliation enroute to the High Places she's plagued by the voices of her family strongholds, "Pride" and "Craven Fear." You may find yourself beset by negative voices until you are completely free of strongholds. Then you can exchange old toxic memories and motivations for Christ-like ones. Be warned: those "inner voices" will haunt you until you diligently replace them with *how Jesus would think* (see 2 Corinthians 10:4,5). You need to *forgive* and *pray for* the people who brought about the distressing memories.

Chapter 6 of *Hinds Feet* is entitled "Detour Through The Desert." Desert experiences can scorch you. There will be times when your expectations aren't being met, and the mutual encouragement to press on is waning. But it is in the desert that Much Afraid enters the pyramid where grain is ground into powder, where the potter molds the clay, and where the furnace burns off the dross. Our Lord uses these refining processes until our hearts can agree with the little flower who patiently awaits a drip of water from the pipe outside the pyramid: "Behold me! My name is Acceptance with Joy."

It's during their desert experience that many abandon the journey and refuse to continue in the Shepherd's refining process. So much false preaching has promised them carnal lies of health, wealth and happiness to appease their flesh. Or, they partake of "religious service" to feel good about themselves but continue living as the world does in sinful pursuits and activities. However, when God refines them as His Word promises, disillusion sinks in. (We discuss this more fully in segments 12 thru 15 of our *Way of the Lord* videos.)

When each of us is individually and collectively prepared to fully cooperate with our Father's ways of conforming us to the character of Jesus, we can press on in the journey no matter what obstacles seem to lie in our path. Much Afraid often faced times of human loneliness, and you will too. "Sorrow" and "Suffering" led her to seemingly impossible situations to overcome so that her faith would develop the confidence she'd need for even greater "impossibilities." Are you willing to learn from these same "teachers"?

Chapter 13 finds Much Afraid proceeding down into the Valley of Loss, which provides

the "sharpest and keenest test which she had encountered on the journey." Here she comes to realize that she is in fact in the Valley of *Forgiveness*. You can't go any further in Jesus until forgiveness becomes the hallmark of your attitude toward ALL people, no matter what they've done. Obviously, this is a work of the Spirit in you IF you are willing to yield to Him. A forgiving heart keeps no record of wrongs and reflects the humility our Lord uses to entrust you with spiritual anointing and power. A forgiving heart is where His grace in and through you begins to do its greatest work.

But one last development must take place, again individually and collectively, before our Lord releases you to effectively represent Him in the world. You find in Chapter 16, "Grave On The Mountain," that Much Afraid encounters the deep, mist-filled chasm. She must decide at that point whether or not to jump in, abandoning any desire for ordinary human love so that she might acquire the loving power to lay her life down for another. This is a sacrificial love, a devotion that only the Shepherd of your soul can infuse in you by His Spirit. *Death to self* so you can serve the needs of others can be far harder than your physical demise!

Only when her transformation is complete is Much Afraid given a new name to reflect her new character, Grace and Glory. She is now an available and useful instrument in the Shepherd's hand to represent His loving heart back in the Valley of Humiliation among those who had hurt her. We encourage you and those with whom you share a mutual eagerness to grow in Christ-likeness to go through and discuss the study guide together. There's so much to glean and joyfully incorporate into your relationship with our Lord and with each other; *Going to the High Places* and *Mutually Growing Christ-like Relationships* can be valuable companions for you on your journey!

You might be tempted to "journey to the High Places" alone and avoid all that potential relational interaction. (We've observed that people who are addicted to their computers and techie gadgets really prefer impersonal cyberspace contact to the complications of authentic relationship!) But self-imposed isolation isn't the way of the Kingdom. It's the Christ-like relationship that blooms and flourishes between those who proceed on journeytogether (even spouses and/or children and faith family) that reflects the "body life" of those in Jesus.

Each person in whom the Spirit of Christ resides through new birth is a member of His body. Jesus is the glorious Head, and each part is held together by joints and ligaments (Colossians 2:19). The human body would be a pile of bones if it weren't for the relational connectedness between the ligaments and the joints. So it is with the spiritual body. Love-grounded, dead-to-self-interest relationships merge for the common purpose to function to the glory of our Lord.

***"Greater love has no one than this,  
that he lay down his life for his friends"*** (John 15:13)

Relational commitment that sacrifices self for the good of others is the true essence of biblical, *agape* love. Self-sacrifice to serve others as Jesus would, however, is neither cherished nor promoted in today's worldly manifestations of Christendom. The all-important, self-benefiting "I" becomes the motive for most collective spiritual practice: "I'm here for the entertaining preaching." "I really enjoy the worship." "The youth group is the only way I can get my kids to church." "This is the denomination I was raised in." But have you ever heard anyone express that, "Through this faith community WE can learn to love other people like Jesus would and bring the lost into His Kingdom"?

Relational commitment to the King and to one another should be the banner of a follower of Jesus. It's a heart issue that far supersedes much of contemporary agnostic acknowledgment ("There is a god, but you can't know him/her) or universal deism ("All paths of religion lead to God so long as you're a 'good person'"). Jesus could have confined His relationship to His disciples as "Lord", which indeed He was. But notice that He also called them "friends" (John 15:15).

Even the Apostle Paul was willing to leave an effective ministry so he could track down a close friend he was concerned about: *"Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia"* (2 Corinthians 2:12,13). Relational commitment, especially when it's aimed at becoming more Christ-like and serving His purposes more effectively together, is precious in the sight of your Father!

If you realize that you don't have anyone with whom you're relationally connected and committed for the glory of our Lord, then consider this. Perhaps you're trapped in a pit of what we call "**codependent toleration**." You put up with others and avoid bringing up anything that might cause apprehension. You dance around each other to make sure nothing rocks the complacency or superficiality (even if the relationship never deepens because of this intentional neglect). But that isn't authentic friendship, and certainly not biblical fellowship!

In 1978 a man named Jim Jones led 900 people, many of them self-identified "Christians" or "churched," to commit suicide in Guiana. Afterward the father of one of the victims paid for a study to determine if there was a common thread among those who had voluntarily chosen death. The finding? *None* of these people had a close friend to share their innermost feelings with. Most came from established congregations, but none had anyone they called their *friend*. A generation has passed since then and isolation has only increased. Are you among the relationally isolated? How would Father have you change that? ASK Him, putting no limitations on how He might answer! (For more on Jim Jones go to: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Jones)).

Please be diligent to pursue the materials we cited above. You'll undoubtedly find it won't be convenient for you to go through them with someone else. This means you'll need to be determined and intentional to establish a specific time for yourselves as a

priority. In the meantime we'll be corresponding on occasion in the weeks to come as the Spirit leads. We're presently continuing our Spanish study for whatever purpose our Lord might have in our own journey. May you find Him at work in and around and through you for His praise!

Along with you on the journey,  
**Mike & Sue**