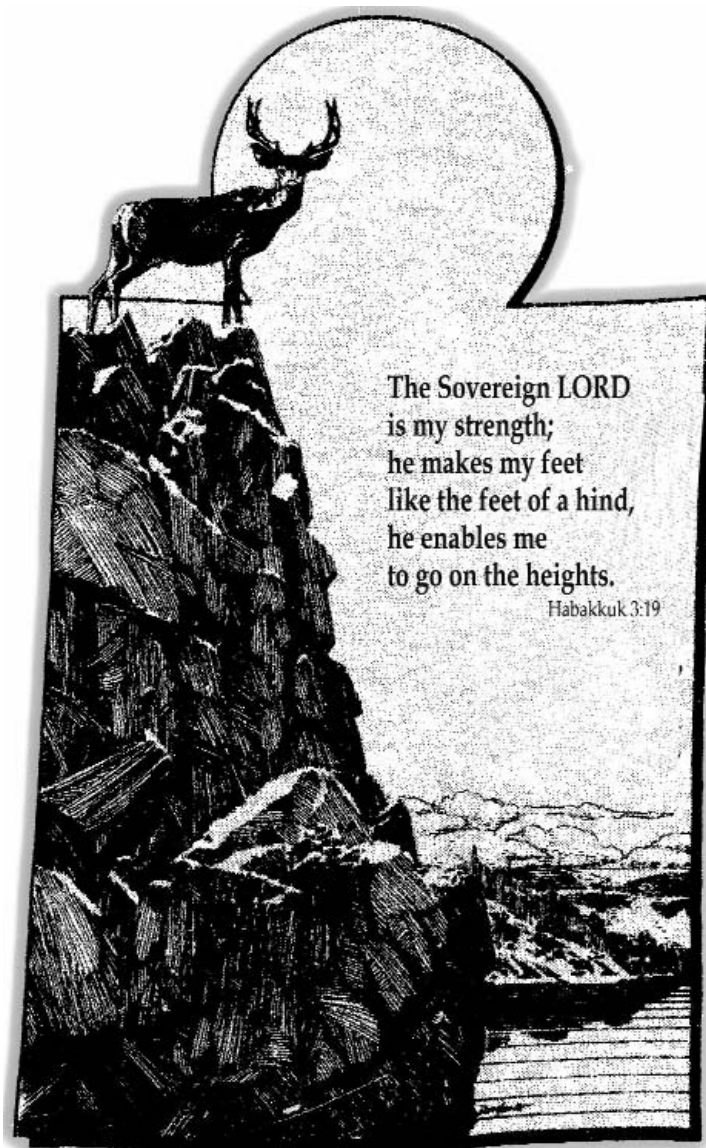


Going to the High Places

Chapter 10 *Ascent of the Precipice Injury*



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Chapter 10 *Ascent of the Precipice Injury*

As you continue your climb up the precipice, a vital new stone will be added to the foundation of Jesus' character being constructed in your life. Any idea what it is?

1. Once on the track...; 2. She did not look down...; 3. Just then, she looked...; 4. She remembered the Shepherd's warning...

When you're asked to undertake a new experience, be it a new job, a relocation, even an encounter with some new neighbors, does a certain reluctant fear sneak up? Do you procrastinate about making that phone call or following through in that opportunity?

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single footstep." Perhaps like you, Much-Afraid wasn't an avid thrill-seeker when it comes to trying new things. But the *goal* kept her going! Her trust in her Shepherd and in His plan for her motivated her to keep putting one foot in front of the other. And this is what your Father is asking of you: to follow in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21).

If that's your goal — your heart's desire — then you'll still have to clamber over the jagged rocks and slippery mud in your path. But like Much-Afraid, as long as you hold onto your awareness of His Spirit's faithful presence to comfort you and grace you with His strength, your goal will be in reach!

Sue: Sometimes you need to reflect about our Lord's faithfulness to have brought you thus far. That which He has carried you through is living testimony of His loving power and intervention — all of which is powerful ammunition to shield you when your past spiritual enemies try to fling rocks of shame and failure at you.

We meet far too many in the Nicolaitan system who are *well-intentioned* in their desire to serve our Father. Sadly, though, just as many fail to *follow through* on their

convictions, particularly if it means forsaking their present lifestyle or companions.

You've heard some of these intentions: "I'm checking into short-term missions for next summer." "I plan to spend every Sunday afternoon sharing Scripture and praying with the elderly at the nursing home down the street." "I've decided to set my alarm an hour earlier each morning to spend time in prayer and the Word." Sound familiar? *Too* familiar?

An old saying illustrates pipe dreams of dabbling inaction: "The man who is just *putting on* his armor should not brag as one *coming back* from the battlefield."

So many Christians share testimonies of *intent* as if their plans were an already accomplished fact. They're not alone. Nicolaitanism allows *teachers* to present truths they haven't necessarily lived. This makes the whole idea of a life journey very conceptual — words without action. James, however, insists that *action* evidence the vitality of our faith: "*In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead*" (James 2:16,26).

Once you've *acted* on that which the Spirit has prompted you, you're then qualified to speak. Remember: the testimony from the *top* of each precipice you've climbed is far different than that which you have from the bottom.

- How about your own testimonies? Do they reveal actions based upon your trusting obedience?
- Are they testimonies of things you've *read* (vicariously living through others' responses), or of your own follow through in the Spirit? Is God's presence and intervention clearly seen in your testimony?

**5. So the three of them climbed higher...;
6. The track they followed...**

What a delight to live so close to the soaring Front Range of the Rockies! Sue and I relish our hikes through the high forests along the glorious ridge trails west of Colorado Springs. One trail in particular opens up as you climb to reveal aerial vistas of the Springs and the vast prairies to the East. That trail is special, one on which we like to bring our friends — those who can handle a hike at 9,000 feet!

Just as heights give you a different perspective of your surroundings, so do your times of surrender at your altars along the way. It isn't so much what you give up, but your growing confidence in your Lord that makes the journey worth it all. You realize that *knowing about* Jesus pales to really getting to *know Him*.

As you grow in experience with our Lord you can see events in your past from *His* perspective. You realize that past hurts and let-downs were part of His development process to increase Christ-like character in you.

Your particular history, scars and all, played a large part in who you are today, even if those experiences seem as far away to you as “the western sea, along the shores of which they'd traveled for so long.”

A dear friend spent a number of years in prison a while back. His accounts of our Lord's faithfulness to get his attention, cleanse him, and transform him into a “new vessel equipped for His work” have stirred many people to change. Some have learned from his testimony that they need to avoid or turn away from the path that got him there in the first place. Others have experienced the joy of beginning to serve Jesus in the fertile prison field by sowing and harvesting seeds of life in His name.

Our Father doesn't intend for you to walk in shame because of your past. Jesus *cleansed* you from all your wrongdoing when you humbly came to Him in repentance and trusted in His bloody sacrifice on your behalf. BY receiving His forgiveness for your wrong, you can be a lantern of hope to

someone who struggles with disbelief that he or she can find forgiveness and reconciliation in Him too.

Any fear that those memories will hurt you are as impotent as the rocks tossed by Much-Afraid's nemeses from her past. What you went through back then was a reality. Now ask our Father for the wisdom to know how and when to use that victorious testimony of His intervention to bring help to others!

- Are there “hidden treasures” from your past about which you're too ashamed to mention because you fear others' response? Ask our Father to remove that “sting” so that these can be used appropriately to bring hope to fellow travelers!

7. On arriving there just as darkness fell...;

In an earlier study we quoted the poem “Step By Step”, one that has so impacted our lives that we included it at the end of our book, *Demolishing Strongholds*. One of the poem's stanzas paints a vibrant word picture of our journey up the precipice:

One step thou seest — then go forward boldly,
One step is far enough for faith to see;
Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee,
For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.

Once you take that first step of obedience, you're able to perceive things around you in a way that you couldn't have before you started the climb. As Much-Afraid continued to take one shaky step at a time, she encountered unexpected relief that had gone unnoticed from her earlier perspective at ground level. The rope and plank bridge were a welcome delight that she never would have been able to appreciate had she abandoned her quest and not taken that first step upward.

One step of *faith that leads to action* separates the true followers of Jesus from

those who are Christian in name only. And each step of obedient trust takes you further and further away from those who won't even embark on the first step.

Sue: I remember being surprised by joy when I first began to teach kindergarten at a small Christian school. My educational background included nothing about introducing little ones to the wonder of reading and writing. But our Father accepted my dependent, untrained willingness as a start. He constructed a "resource plank" for me and a strong rope of encouragement through my students' parents and fellow teachers so that my chasm of self-doubt was crossed with laughter and His sufficiency!

Much-Afraid also learned much along the way about harnessing her thoughts: "From bitter experience she knew that pictures thrown on the screen of her imagination could seem much more unnerving and terrible than the actual fears." Each single step of faith is powerful evidence that you are trusting the One Who has called you to take it.

When you choose to depend on your Lord, you're proclaiming boldly and clearly that His power is all you need, even when your circumstances don't appear to have changed. Continue to take your thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to Jesus. As you do, you'll grow in relaxation and be prepared to appreciate a resting place for yourself and your family when it comes your way!

- Recall an assignment of some sort that you had to fulfill even though you felt totally inadequate or unprepared. How were you able to follow through on it?
- How did you see your Lord intervene on your behalf when you cried out to Him?

8. When the plank was crossed...; 9. With a sense of great relief...; 10. Not far from the cave...

Sue: Some of our most refreshing resting places from our Father's hand have been marked by wonderful simplicity. Yes, we've marveled with the throngs at national parks and amusement areas, but do you know what? The days spent in a friend's rustic, rural cabin on a dirt road, the nights wrapped in a sleeping bag in the back of our camped van, the serene drives through the mountains just for a few hours — these are the memories that have reminded Mike and me of the importance of *slowing down* and breathing in the quiet every so often.

Much-Afraid and her companions were filled with "great relief and thankfulness" for their modest cave setting. They didn't need HBO or a heated pool to satiate their needs! A simple meal, fresh water, and comfy bed replenished them because they weren't bedeviled by a need to be entertained.

We know that getting away even for a few hours of quiet can be a challenge if you have small children. But ask our Father to open for you an avenue of simple renewal to shut down for a brief rest.

When Mike and I were caring full-time for Mike's Mom after her strokes, that one hour a day when the home health aide came allowed us a breather so that our ears didn't have to be attuned to meeting needs. And sometimes that's all you need!

- Describe a period of rest and refreshment hallmarked by simplicity that has met your need. What step would it take for you to enjoy even a brief time of refreshment?
- Are you most replenished in body, soul and spirit when you are totally alone? With a loved one? With a group of friends?

11. Much-Afraid woke with the first light...

Envision for a moment the prophet Elijah. The beleaguered old man had done great things for God, walking in the most powerful anointing of his day. Yet in order for him to receive a clearer understanding of the Lord he served, God brought him to Mount Horeb, the Mountain of Desolation.

Mike: I can identify with Elijah in some ways. During the four years that led up to our time in Israel I went through painful trials of betrayal and loneliness. When Sue and I returned to the US our Lord gave me a reason for that scathing period of wretchedness: He needed to desolate me of motives that were not like His.

I recalled this season of refinement as Much-Afraid looked out at the desolation around her. Life's precipices are a time in which you are desolated of motivations that once had control of you. A nationally-known teacher publicly shared this concept after his bout with cancer: "Before I had cancer" he related, "I thought Jesus was number one in my life. But when I became ill, I realized that He *wasn't* number one, but about fourth or fifth. Now I can honestly say that my relationship with Jesus is my top priority." Isn't it amazing what it takes to change our motivations!

The Psalmist also understood the value of suffering to alter life purposes: "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees*" (Psalm 119:67,72).

- Look around you right now. Can you see something that God would like to remove from your life because it is hindering your relationship with Him? What are you willing to do about what He shows you?
- Can you think of a time when affliction changed your character or motives?

- In your priorities, where would *you* place Jesus in your life? Where would *He* put Himself in light of your current lifestyle and choices?

12. Just then she looked up...; 13. Much-Afraid stared...; 14. At that moment...

One of the marvels of our Father's hand in the arid outskirts of Colorado Springs has been the variety of brilliant blossoms tucked into the dry grasses and gray-green shrubs. When the Psalmist exulted that "the trees clap their hands", he must have meant the flowers as well! Only our Lord Jesus, by Whom all things are made, could cause a single seedling to take root in seemingly inhospitable conditions, then blaze forth in brilliant color!

Sue: Have you ever been amazed at the sight of a lush juniper or pine rising to the sky from the side of a sheer cliff? How can it hold on? From where does it derive its nutrients? Yet there it stands, a silent witness to the Hand that nourishes and sustains it in its impossible perch!

Let's put this in human terms now. Our persecuted brothers and sisters in China and Indonesia, for example, struggle to survive with the barest of food and shelter. Yet like that little red flower, they find strength in the presence of the Spirit of Jesus within, and their life-sustaining hope of His promise of eternal life. They are vibrant testimony of the Rock Who holds them in His unfailing grip just as the crevice gripped the flower's roots.

- When have you unexpectedly come upon a tiny piece of His creation when you least thought you'd find it? What was there about it that especially caught your eye?
- Are you interceding for particular persecuted family members in Jesus? If not, consid-

er contacting Voice of the Martyrs at their website: www.persecution.com for the names and needs of specific brothers and sisters.

15. “My name is ‘Bearing the Cost...; 16. Then Much-Afraid recalled...; 17. She gazed at the little flower...; 18. Once more, a little whispering laugh...”

Consequences result from every action you take, every word spoken to another person, every encounter you face. It’s a fact of life! Even if you don’t intend it, someone else’s actions or involvement in your life are going to impact your life for good or for ill.

Much-Afraid is given the chance early on to consider the truth of Bearing-the-Cost’s words. The little flower had no choice about the place in which she’d been left. Yet it was up to her to decide whether to shrivel up and die or to turn with hope to the light. And as we all know, from each blossom emerges many little seeds for future gardens.

Sue and I have no doubt about Who told us in Israel to share this message — our Father! We also know that it may take three generations before the fruit of what we are sharing comes forth. In other words, you may be pressing onward for a gift that your *grandchildren* may be blessed with.

Perhaps you’re thinking that we’re repeating certain biblical themes too often. But the apostle Peter cherished reminders, so we’ll follow his example: “*So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body*” (2 Peter 1:12,13).

We’ve already stated that when God brings you to an “impassible precipice” He wants you to look back at what you went through to get there. Why? Countless thousands of Christians are hindered from proceeding further because they hold *begrudging attitudes* toward God and others who have

hurt them or let them down in their lives.

“Begrudging” isn’t the angry type of bitterness, but a seething inner resentment — the worst kind that impairs your health and contaminates all your relationships. Unless you reverently fear God and are fully confident that He means what He says in His Word, it’s impossible for you to free yourself from begrudging bitterness. This is why it’s vital that you pay attention to the lesson that Bearing-the-Cost offers.

The most important character quality you can teach your children is to have a forgiving heart. Remember the Lord’s Prayer? “*Forgive us our debts, as we also have already forgiven our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). To be a follower of Jesus means that you have already forgiven those who hurt you, even at the moment they cause you pain. Isn’t that the testimony of both Jesus and the first martyr, Stephen, “*Father, forgive them...*”?

There is no middle ground in this. If you and your children don’t forgive, then our Lord Jesus warns, “*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matthew 6:14,15).

If you yearn to follow Jesus, then love and forgiveness must go hand-in-hand in your walk. As Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 13, if you do not love, then all your activity, your gifting, and your service to God are meaningless. And consider this: If you don’t forgive, you do not have eternal life. “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him*” (1 John 3:14,15).

We live in a fallen world, and people get hurt. The ultimate cost you bear for being hurt in the world is to *forgive*. Please don’t treat this matter lightly. Your eternal state is at stake!

- The diagram at the bottom of the next page appeared in our August 2003 newsletter.

How far to the right of the diagram are *you* concerning those who once hurt you?

- When you think of a particular person, does resentment come to mind? Forgive this individual from your heart, *and* consider asking him or her for forgiveness for *your* begrudging attitude against them.

19. “I have borne and have not fainted...; 20. Much-Afraid looked...; 21. At that moment a fragment...

It’s all too easy to get distracted by responsibilities and even pleasures so that Jesus fades as your foremost priority. He’s not looking for your respect that He’s a great teacher, your sense of duty as you come before Him, or your vast knowledge of His Word. Jesus lives to intercede for those He loves, and for those who love Him!

What your devotion to Jesus has cost you in terms of material gain or worldly companions is dross compared to walking in confident relationship with Him. Others have their own relationship with Jesus to contend with. The question for you is: Do *you* have absolute assurance of His faithfulness to lead you Home?

Your answer calls for an *eternal* perspective about your life here on earth. This is

often hard to maintain since we do live in this world. Yet we are warned often in the Word to not let our motivations align themselves with those of the world (e.g., John 15:19, 2 Corinthians 10:3, James 4:4).

We are just sojourners passing through this world toward an eternal destination. If we’re still on earth when Jesus returns, we “*will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17,18).

The words we speak really do help steer other people’s hearts toward the loving faithfulness of Jesus. Think of that the next time you’re eating dinner with others, on the phone, online, or even at the checkout counter!

Our Father esteems the ones whose trust and hope prevail. He affirms those whose view extends beyond this world: “[*Abraham*] was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God... They were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:10;16).

Much-Afraid’s words resounded with an eternal resonance, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire but thee.” Let’s make this a true song in our own hearts as well!

- Do you initiate conversations with others in

Turning Bitterness to Blessing
Comparison of the Hebraic and Nicolaitan Approaches

Hebraic: The Bible mandates that you forgive *without exception*; to belong to Jesus *is* to forgive. Forgiveness gets you out of *negative* territory on the chart to ‘0’. The emotional healing given by Jesus occurs as you enter *positive* territory through prayer for, and good deeds toward, the one who has hurt you. The further a forgiving person goes into positive territory, the less likely bitterness will return.

Unforgiveness					Forgiveness					Blessing										
-100	-90	-80	-70	-60	-50	-40	-30	-20	-10	0	+10	+20	+30	+40	+50	+60	+70	+80	+90	+100
enraged bitterness, hatred, begrudging, resentful										prayer for, sympathy, compassion, enacted love and kindness										

Nicolaitanism: Forgiveness is optional; past circumstances such as “*abuse*” and “*dysfunctional family*” are grounds for not forgiving. Few even get back to ‘0’; and the ones who do, ultimately end up back in negative territory — unforgiveness.

the faith about eternity? If you don't, what keeps you from doing so? Really, think about it. Is eternity *real* for you, or just a vague hope for some future day?

- Ask your journey partner or your family what topics are foremost in your conversations. Jesus tells us, "*Out of the heart the mouth speaks.*" What do your words reveal?

22. After a little they came to a place...; 23. Immediately Sorrow...; 24. Much-Afraid was so faint...; 25. Then Suffering herself...

You don't know how deep your convictions are or what your character is made of until they are tested. Eager plans and good intentions are meaningless until they are tested in adversity. That's when the cost is really borne! You really can't consider yourself to be "forgiving" until you have someone you need to forgive.

Forgiveness becomes a way of life. It's not just your relational "biggies" that need attention. Even the careless motorist who cuts you off is an opportunity to exercise your willingness to forgive! The Book of Proverbs abounds with the theme of choosing to forgive, but two serve as examples of practical application: "*A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult*" (Proverbs 12:16). "*A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense*" (Proverbs 19:11). Are you walking in wisdom or foolishness?

Activity-based relationships are seldom tested. They aren't based on growing devotion to each other. Much-Afraid's companions didn't just offer platitudes or verses. They came to her aid as *relational load-bearers*. Coming alongside, they put their arms around her, secured her safety tether, and reminded her of the Shepherd's cordial of grace and comfort. When she was unable to

even appropriate that, they poured it into her themselves!

Sue: I'm reminded of the stretcher-bound paralytic and his four faithful friends. They trusted Jesus enough, and loved their friend so dearly, that they went to extreme lengths to bring him to the One Who could heal!

In order for personal relationships to grow in intimacy as the extended spiritual family our Lord intends, they need to pass through relational hurdles in which they are tested. Negative situations in a relationship aren't always a sign of failure, but of areas that need development through further exploration. That's why we wrote *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation* — to help people work through their difficulties and come through with a stronger relationship.

- What special friendships have endured the test of misunderstanding, letdown or painful argument? What steps restored your relationship?
- Who in your life has the freedom to confront you to help you to press on in your walk in Jesus? When was the last time he or she did so?

26. Then Sorrow, who had come...; 27. At last Suffering stooped...; 28. Much-Afraid gave her...; 29. "What flower was that?" ...; 30. "It was the flower of Bearing-the-Cost"...

None of us likes to be known as a "moaner". Even Scripture warns against grumbling and complaining! As painful as your present situation may be, no friend can solve your problem for you — it's really a heart issue you're facing. Even the most patient of comforting friends needs to know when to back off and direct you to Jesus, the

Key to your restored peace.

That's exactly what Suffering does. She *confronts* Much-Afraid with the lesson that had been placed before her just that morning by Bearing-the-Cost. True friends don't let another friend wallow in a pity-party. They redirect their buddy back to firm footing, in this case, applying what has already been revealed by our Lord.

Without lecturing her on the benefits of forgiveness, Suffering stirs Much-Afraid to discover within her own previous experience a solution to the problem at hand. If you're a parent then you understand this concept. Lessons that emerge from your child's own wellspring of figuring it out are likelier to be retained than those you just tell them. Sorrow and Suffering knew that the Shepherd's cordial would help their limping friend, but how much more valuable for Much-Afraid's growth in wisdom for *her* to come up with the same conclusion!

Don't feel that *you* have to come up with all the answers for a suffering friend. Instead, respond in such a way that your hurting friend can discover how faithful Jesus is in his or her own circumstances. Even praying together allows an opening for the Holy Spirit to breathe the answer into your midst.

- What evidence can you give to indicate that you are growing in "Bearing-the-Cost" in even minor irritations and frustrations?
- What particular incident in your life stands out in which someone came to your aid out of love when you were suffering? When was the last time you made contact with that person to thank them again for encouraging you when you so desperately needed it?

31. "Let us try" ...; 32. As they dropped a little...; 33. There, coming toward them...

In a few chapters we'll encounter another hurdle in which only your complete forgiveness will permit you to go on further. Now is a good time to give yourself a "forgiveness check" and make sure there is no one against whom you hold any resentment, grudges, or irritation — even from your past! Have you let go of *everyone* in the freedom of forgiveness?

When was the last time you went to a funeral or visited a graveside? These are times to poignantly realize that your own earthly life is going to come to an end like all the others who preceded you. The generation who walked in front of us among our family members is all but gone for Sue and me. Now it's *our* turn to be prepared to leave this earth.

Each one of us will stand at the Judgment Throne by ourselves, bowing before the pierced Lord Who died to atone for our sins. I believe He'll be asking if we have *loved* as *He* has loved. And that means, as well, that we have *forgiven* as *He* forgives.

Take some time to free your mind from this world's endeavors for awhile. Get away briefly from the distractions of your family, your job, and whatever clamors for your attention. Stop to ponder the issues of eternity and the path in life you are on. Remember, you're heading toward your salvation. Your pilgrimage is not yet complete!

"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12b,13).