

Adventuring with God

with Jeanne Hedrick

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Living for His Glory

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."

2 Thessalonians 2:16

For serious Christians, the most natural inclination for our hearts is to be discontent with an ordinary, predictable spiritual life. So we spend our time and energy seeking some kind of mountaintop experience with God – the extraordinary, supernatural encounters that inspire us and keep us excited about our walk with Him. We focus on the scriptural passages that encourage us to seek His face and to pursue more and more of His power and presence in our lives. And spiritually we berate ourselves for settling for less than awe-inspiring, life-changing experiences with our God.

But what about the valleys between the mountaintop experiences? Are they just the means of getting from one peak to another, or do they have some kind of intrinsic value in and of themselves?

I have been thinking about this lately, having just returned to a full time job that is eating up a lot of my time from Monday to Friday every week. I rise early to get ready for work; I drive the half hour in rush hour traffic to arrive on time; I focus my time and attention on the tasks on my desk and my co-workers, who are also thinking mostly about how to best accomplish their job throughout the day. I return home in rush hour traffic, spent of energy and inspiration as I face a few hours of respite before doing the same thing the next day.

It would be easy to ask: Where is God in all this routine and tedium? How can I focus on my relationship with Him when I have to give my time and energy to so many other things? Far from the exhilaration of a mountain top, I find myself in the valley far more than I'd like. When I'm not at work, I am doing all the other necessities that keep our household going: shopping, cleaning, sorting, doing laundry, paying bills, cooking, etc. Hardly the kind of things that I imagine giants of the faith doing! And the challenges of the valley are even greater for those with children at home, those who travel for their jobs and must be away from their

families, and those who face serious illnesses as they juggle all their responsibilities.

As counter intuitive as it may seem to us, I believe that God may have more for us in the valley than we ever receive on the peaks. Yes, we get to enjoy the mountain tops from time to time. And they are wonderfully refreshing and motivating for our life of faith. In the valley, however, I get to test my spiritual mettle. Here I intersect with other people and I see firsthand how much of Christ's character I have put on. Here I am confronted with things I would never see in the heights, and through those experiences I learn the lessons that I would have no other way of learning. In the valley we touch others and they touch us. We find out if truly "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The mountain top can't tell me that – and I need to know.

In the valley we are stretched, spent, and changed. Sometimes we are crushed, humiliated, and even abused. Whatever challenges the valley may bring, we come to value God's mercy and love to us. And we learn how to minister to others in His power, not our own. Where else would we learn patience, perseverance, and humility? Where else would we see how our old nature continues to plague us and we must submit it once again to the only one who can master it – the Lord Jesus?

One of my favorite devotional writers is Oswald Chambers. Here is how he sees the comparative value of peaks and valleys.

"After each time of exaltation we are brought down with a sudden rush into things as they are where it is neither beautiful nor poetic nor thrilling. The height of the mountain top is measured by the drab drudgery of the valley; but it is in the valley that we have to live for the glory of God. .that is where our faithfulness is revealed."

The mount has its purpose too. We see His glory there and we need to see the object to which we aspire. But seeing and doing are two different things. In the valley we *live* for His glory, which is of course far more important, even if it is a lot harder to do.

So let's embrace the myriad challenges of everyday life - the mounds of laundry, demanding bosses, meddling neighbors, ungrateful kids and disrespectful spouses, rising costs, unexpected setbacks, and boring, tedious tasks. Fortunately, it's not all drudgery in the valley; there are bright spots too along the way. With God in the equation we can find blessing in the most unexpected places. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains

also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God" (Psalm 84:5-7).

Lord Jesus, help me to not despise the lowliness of the valley. Help me to see that you were tested there too – and you came forth as gold! Teach me how to turn the routines of my life into places of joy as I partake of your life in them. I will seek and enjoy the mountain top experiences with you when they come. But help me not to see them as the epitome of spiritual life. Use them to motivate me as I walk through the valley, seeking to glorify you as I fulfill the services you have ordained for me. I thank you that nothing is too lowly, too ordinary to be touched and transformed by your presence. Make my valley a place of rich fruitfulness as I learn to abide in you, my true vine. Amen.