

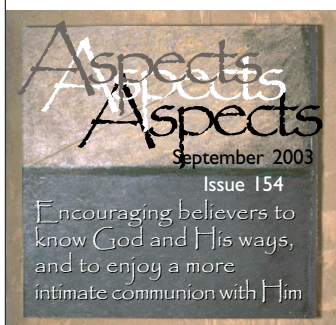
The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying,
“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.
Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!
Again you will take up your tambourines,

And go forth to the dances of the merrymakers.
Again you will plant vineyards
On the hills of Samaria;
The planters will plant
And will enjoy them.”

Jeremiah 31:3-5



The idea of comfort food is associated as much with aromas as with taste—maybe more so. For this writer it is defined by a moment indelibly etched into my memory. If today Linda fixes chicken a certain way, the aromas wafting down the stairs from the kitchen to my desk take me immediately back to my childhood in the '50s and '60s...



Our family's Sunday routine actually began on Saturday. Dad, who taught the junior high boys, would prepare his Sunday School lesson, and would make sure that his own two boys polished their shoes in preparation for the Sabbath. Sunday morning breakfast would always include devotions around the kitchen counter where we ate, then, while the three men of the family dressed for church in starched white shirts and ties, Mom would finish preparations for the after-church meal.

Because all of us would be spending the entire morning at the church, the main meal of the day had to be something that could be safely left in the oven all that time, and ready once we got home. Invariably that would be one of two standard fares: a pot roast cooked in a roaster with carrots, potatoes and onions, or chicken that had been dusted with flour, salt and pepper, browned in a skillet, then placed in the roaster. The oven would be set at a low temperature, and the meal would cook for the rest of the morning.

Upon returning home, the smell of the meal would greet us even as we ascended the steps of the front porch, but when the door opened we would immediately be enveloped in the hearty aromas emanating from the kitchen. To this day that is the smell of Sundays for me—and a reminder of the

basic, Midwestern, meat-and-potatoes cooking on which I was raised. And, admittedly, that delightful smell is also associated with "comfort" in another way: it marked the point in every Sunday when a young lad could loosen his starched collar, remove his tie and polished shoes, and relax on the sofa with the Sunday funnies—something which, at that young age, was much more fun than the interminable sermon he had just listened to from a hard, wooden pew.

We live in a world that moves very fast. The speed of today's technology—of cell phones and computers, e-mail and "instant messages" instead of letters, of fast cars and "video conferencing"—now sets the pace of our lives. We naturally expect things to happen *now*, not later. We do not expect to have to wait for anything: we live in an "instant-on" world.

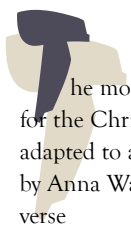
Living at such a breakneck speed we can do little more than just skim the surface. Friendships are gossamer thin; concepts such as loyalty to and from a place of employment are lost in the antiquated past; even those choices we make for fun and "relaxation" are not at all relaxing, or restorative, but as fast-paced as the rest of our lives. There is precious little comfort in such an existence. So when our ends get

frayed—when the inevitable overload occurs—we have left ourselves very little from which to draw solace and renewed strength.

Sadly, this also describes our relationship with the Lord. For so long we have taken Him in tidbits, fast and thin, barely skimming across the surface of all that He has to offer. As a result, we too often reach the end of our faith, frayed and irritated, left scratching our head over this God about which we know so little.

But most of us can remember, if we take a moment and really try, the basic meat-and-potatoes of our faith—those essential, foundational promises that we learned as a kid in Sunday School. These promises are the Spiritual equivalent to the still-warm apple pie our mom made, the hearty aromas spilling from a kitchen filled with love and other good things. We have tried to sustain ourselves for too long on salads and sushi, on fancy desserts too small to find on a small plate. Sometimes we just need to sit down to a meal of roast beef, fried chicken and mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, and polish it all off with a thick wedge of hot apple pie crowned with ice cream.

Once in a while our soul needs some comfort food, something that takes us back to the basics of God's truth—and the promises that prove His love for us.



The most universal source of comfort for the Christian—the one most readily adapted to any situation—is the one voiced by Anna Warner in her eloquently simple verse

*Jesus loves me! this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.*

*Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me—
The Bible tells me so.*

It is too bad that this hymn has been so often relegated to the exclusive domain of

children's Sunday School in churches across the land. In hymnals of various stripe it is tucked away in the back pages under headings like "Childhood," or "Children's Hymns." It certainly belongs there, for its crystalline message is perfectly suited to the innocent, uncluttered mind. But it also belongs in the sections titled "Inner Peace and Joy," and "Faith and Hope," for its message is even more needed by those whose faith may be cluttered with cynicism or doubt, anxiety or anger.

WHEN ASKED TO SUMMARIZE THE ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, THE GREAT SWISS THEOLOGIAN KARL BARTH GAVE THIS SIMPLE ANSWER: "JESUS LOVES ME, THIS I KNOW,

Jesus Loves Me

FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO." (THE ONE YEAR BOOK OF HYMNS, TYNDALE HOUSE, 1995.)

In comparison to God, we are all "little ones," and compared to His strength, we are all "weak." So the words of this verse should be comfortable and appropriate on the lips of any believer.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10 niv

Different people think differently about God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Some draw a firm line of distinction between God the Father and God the Son. Though they understand that both are fully God, they always see Them as distinctly different personalities, ministering to believers in unique ways, according to their place in the Trinity. Others always picture them as a cohesive unit. Though they understand that each member of the Godhead has His own ministry, they nonetheless begin with Genesis 1:1, where “God” is in the plural, and rarely separate the three.

Both viewpoints are correct—and both viewpoints are incomplete. Jesus does the bidding of the Father, so if the Son loves us (and He does), then so does the Father. If God the Father is untouchable purity (and He is), He still loves us, through the Son, with the intimate compassion of a daddy.

So we find our comfort in the fact that when He loves us Jesus is not acting on His own, separate from the other members of the Trinity. He is, in fact, just lending flesh to the strong, overwhelming love the Godhead as a unit feels for us.

The promise of God’s love is every believer’s fundamental source of comfort. It is at once high and holy, because it emanates from the purity of His throne, and a very human, palpable emotion we all can understand. Every mother holding her child in her arms, every dad playing ball with his son, every bride gazing at her groom, every husband and wife celebrating fifty years together—they all know what love is. And it is just such a love with which Jesus loves us.

Except that His came first.

Life can get wild and wooly out here in the rural wilderness of middle America. Even though I was raised on thunder and lightning—even though a tornado once ripped down Main Street, just a block away from our house—I don’t remember the storms of my youth having the stark intensity of the ones we now experience out here in the country.

The urban environment can have a moderating effect on the weather. The sheer volume of man-made structures, such as buildings and cement streets, holds temperatures longer, thus minimizing the extremes of hot and cold. Likewise, wind that is strong and intense on the town’s outskirts may be softened by the time it reaches the inner neighborhoods. Then too, if disaster *does* strike in the city, help is usually just an arm’s reach away. Neighbors are close at hand, and emergency crews may be just down the street.

Out in the country, however, the rules change. Even in the relatively tamed rural environs of the Midwest—in which we enjoy reliable electricity, satellite TV, and now even piped-in water—there is a sense that when the storm strikes we will be on our own. Though we are surrounded by plentiful trees, our home is perched higher than some of those nearby, and the weather (which is usually from that direction) can get a good run at us from across the valley that lies to the north and west. At the same time, emergency help would take a while to get here—assuming the phone lines were still up to call them—and during and after a

winter blizzard the route here may be simply impassable.

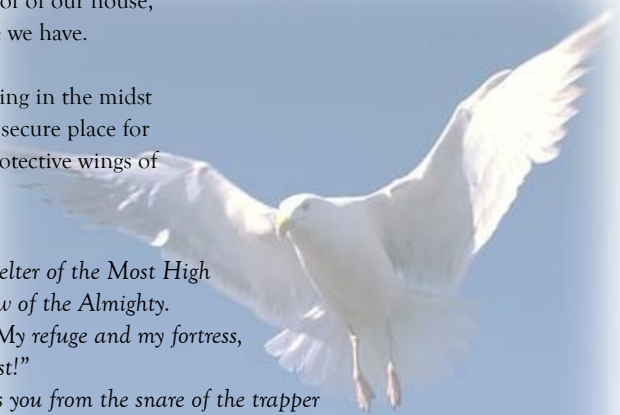
So when a storm approaches, our first instinct is to batten down the hatches and draw everyone inside. Like Noah in his ark, as the man of the house I do not rest until I know everyone in the family is inside, in a place of safety—and sometimes at the lowest level of the house, for maximum protection. The storm outside our walls may still be frightening, but at least the family is together, and, under the roof of our house, in the most protected place we have.

Life itself can be like living in the midst of a tempest, and the most secure place for the believer is under the protective wings of the Father.

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I trust!”
For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper
And from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with His pinions,
And under His wings you may seek refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.
You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Or of the arrow that flies by day;
Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.
A thousand may fall at your side
And ten thousand at your right hand,
But it shall not approach you.*

Safely Abiding

*You will only look on with your eyes
And see the recompense of the wicked.
For you have made the Lord, my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place.*
Psalm 91:1-9



Life without God in Christ is like standing alone on a naked hilltop, huddled against a raging storm filled with the electric crash of lightning and thunder—all the while anticipating the inevitable tornado to follow. No one else can help, and you are utterly helpless against the fury of the tempest. By contrast, those who are in Christ have a loving, attentive Father who wishes only the best for His own. And when danger approaches, He offers them the safety of a place under His majestic, outstretched wings.

Some believe that this means no harm will ever come to them. But that's not what God says. The Christian does not find his comfort in the absence of storms, but in the knowledge that whatever comes his way, God is in it. The Christian's peace is not from walking through each day on clouds, untouched by any malady, crisis, or sorrow. The Christian's peace is from walking through each day—no matter what it brings—under the sovereign will of a loving, but righteous, heavenly Father.

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the Lord delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.
Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous will
be condemned.
The Lord redeems the soul of His
servants,
And none of those who take refuge in
Him will be condemned.*
Psalm 34:19-22

*Under His wings, I am safely abiding;
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,
Still I can trust Him; I know He will keep me;
He has redeemed me, and I am His child.*

*Under His wings, what a refuge in sorrow!
How the heart yearningly turns to His rest!
Often when earth has no balm for my healing,
There I find comfort, and there I am blest.*

*Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment!
There will I hide till life's trials are o'er;
Sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me;
Resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore.*

*Under His wings, under His wings, Who from His love can sever?
Under His wings my soul shall abide, Safely abide forever.*
(William O. Cushing)

The human spirit is a funny thing. Since The Fall, it has invariably run away from that which offers it the greatest and most dependable source of comfort and peace. Odder still, in this weakened condition it has chosen to run faster—to increase its speed away from that dependable source. God has said, “Here it is. Here is what you are looking for. I offer it for free; just take it.” And the world has replied, “No, that’s too simple. Too easy. The way of peace must be harder than that—and it must require some effort on my part.”

Thus the fallen world has continued in a state of perpetual disorientation.

So today we hear faiths based on idolatry or mystical nonsense treated with respect, while fundamental, Scripture-based faith is ridiculed. If you wear a saffron robe and shave your head you are deemed “spiritual,” but if you wear a white shirt and tie on Sunday mornings you are deemed an idiot, a right-wing nut. If you place your

faith in chicken blood or drug-enhanced visions, *National Geographic* will give you a twenty page spread, but if you place your faith in the proven God of the Bible, not a peep.

Without a doubt the fallen realm has its priorities skewed. Yet a similar disorientation takes place every day even within the kingdom populated by believers. Even those who have placed their faith in the God of the Bible, and in His Son, Christ Jesus, repeatedly go running from what they know is the only dependable source of their comfort and peace.

*“When you pass through the waters, I
will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not
overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you
will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.”*
Isaiah 43:2

Power Within

The lyrics of a song popular a few years back include the following lines:

WHEN MY PLANS HAVE FALLEN THROUGH
AND WHEN MY STRENGTH IS NEARLY GONE
WHEN THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO DO
BUT JUST DEPEND ON YOU
AND THE POWER OF YOUR NAME.¹

The verse goes on to say that the ultimate source of strength is “in the name of the Lord,” but before getting there it leaves the erroneous impression that we are to try everything in our own strength first. This flawed but popular philosophy weaves into our daily living the subtle but heretical notion that the power and comfort of God is something available to the believer, but is something we must repeatedly reach out for. On the contrary, God’s word makes it clear that He—in the form of the Holy Spirit—is an intimate, permanent part of every believer. As Jesus said as He was preparing to leave,

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." John 14:16-17

Let's say I have a dear, close friend. He and I know each other as well as I know myself. He's the kind of best friend to whom I never need to explain anything: he knows me so well, that verbal explanations are rarely if ever needed. One day we are walking down a city street together, side by side. Suddenly I trip on the cement, fall, and break my arm. My friend immediately kneels down to help me, reaches for his cell phone to call 911, and says he will go with me to the hospital.

Oddly, however, I reject his help. I tell him to go on without me, finish his shopping and head on home. He protests, pointing out that if I don't wish to wait for an ambulance, his car is parked just a block away. But I insist, making it clear that I don't want or need his help. Reluctantly, he eventually bends to my wishes, and continues on his way, leaving me alone on the sidewalk.

I struggle awkwardly to my feet, pulling myself up a nearby parking meter by using my remaining good arm. An intense pain shoots through me. I cradle my useless arm in my other, but the pain is still there, cutting into me. After only a few steps the pain has sucked away my strength, my very breath, and I lean against a storefront for support as I struggle to continue on. By these halting steps I slowly make my way to a bus stop, and collapse upon the bench. Twenty minutes later the bus arrives. As the

driver impatiently waits, I make my way up the steps, and grope in my pocket for some coins. To do so I must release my dead arm. It flops down to my side and the excruciating pain almost causes me to pass out. I ask the driver if this bus goes by the hospital. He says no, that I will have to transfer twice to reach the hospital, and hands me the necessary transfer slips.

The ride on the first bus is rough, following streets littered with potholes. With each jolt the pain in my arm intensifies. I make the transfer to the second bus, but waiting on the bench for the third, the pain overwhelms me, and I pass out. A moment later the bus arrives, pauses for only a few seconds, then continues on without me.

But unbeknownst to me, my best friend has been following along my route in his car. He has respected my desire to do it on my own, but now, seeing me collapsed upon the bench, he pulls up to the curb and quickly hustles me into the front seat. In moments we arrive at the hospital, and my friend carries me through the Emergency entrance to the hospital.

On a spiritual level, and in varying degrees, believers the world over play out this scene every day of their lives. They believe—they *know*—God is part of their lives. They believe His word about the Holy Spirit coming to live within them. But when the moment comes when they must decide which way they will turn for help, invariably they turn to themselves first, coming to the indwelling Spirit only *after* they have struggled on their own—and failed miserably.

At the moment we accept Christ as our Savior, by His grace—meaning, based entirely on His good favor and generosity,

through no merit of our own—God gives us the Holy Spirit as a constant, never-flagging best friend. He never leaves our side. He never tires. He never complains about the long hours. He never whines about the relationship being too one-sided. He is just always, dependably there as our comforter and friend, advisor, and no-fee, always-on connection to the wisdom and mind of God.

The presence of God in a believer's life, as embodied in the gracious Holy Spirit, is not something one must reach out for—as one would reach out to grasp a railing to steady one's step. Instead, the presence of God is more like one's own beating heart. Remove an arm or a leg, and once the bleeding is stopped, the body survives. Remove the heart, however, and the body dies. This indicates how inextricably the heart is part of the human body.

The Spirit is just so inextricably entwined with the spirit of the believer. He is not someone set apart: separate, but within hailing distance. God does not give the believer a calling card, but a companion. The believer's comfort—no matter what the circumstances—is assured by the gentle Spirit living within, a friend from whom we can *never* be separated.

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold,
You are there.
If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of
me. Psalm 139:7-10*

HERE THE POET INVERTS HIS GAZE, FROM THE BLAZE OF SUNS, TO THE STRANGE ATOMS COMPOSING HIS OWN FRAME. HE STANDS SHUDDERING OVER THE PRECIPICE OF HIMSELF. ABOVE IS THE ALL ENCOMPASSING SPIRIT, FROM WHOM THE MORNING WINGS CANNOT SAVE; AND BELOW, AT A DEEP DISTANCE, APPEARS AMID THE BRANCHING FOREST OF HIS ANIMAL FRAME, SO FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE, THE ABYSS OF HIS SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE, LYING LIKE A DARK LAKE IN THE MIDST. HOW, BETWEEN MYSTERY AND MYSTERY, HIS MIND, HIS WONDER, HIS VERY REASON, SEEM TO ROCK LIKE A LITTLE BOAT BETWEEN

THE SEA AND SKY. BUT SPEEDILY DOES HE REGAIN HIS SERENITY; WHEN HE THROWS HIMSELF, WITH CHILDLIKE HASTE AND CONFIDENCE, INTO THE ARMS OF THAT FATHERLY SPIRIT, AND MURMURS IN HIS BOSOM, "HOW PRECIOUS ALSO ARE THY THOUGHTS UNTO ME, O GOD; HOW GREAT IS THE SUM OF THEM"; AND LOOKING UP AT LAST IN HIS FACE, CRIES — "SEARCH ME, O LORD. I CANNOT SEARCH THEE; I CANNOT SEARCH MYSELF; I AM OVERWHELMED BY THOSE DREADFUL DEPTHS; BUT SEARCH ME AS THOU ONLY CANST; SEE IF THERE BE ANY WICKED WAY IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING."

(GEORGE GILFILLAN, ON PSALM 139)

Immortal Life

For the average dweller on earth there is precious little comfort in death. From our earliest days we are indoctrinated—by family, by school chums, by our society at large—to loathe and fear the absence of life. Those who welcome death are typically those for whom living has become unbearable because of oppression, despair, or constant pain. For those not in these darker circumstances, mortal death represents the end of the familiar, the end of everything we know and hold dear.

But that just means we haven't learned the right things—and that, perhaps, we are holding dear the wrong things.

Mortal death for the believer does not represent the cessation of life, but its enhancement.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." Revelation 21:1-4

It is a fool's occupation to conjecture about heaven. From Scripture we do know a few facts. For example, much of what we think of as happening in "heaven" will actually transpire on earth—a new earth—as the new Jerusalem is set into place, and the saints become co-rulers with Christ. The popular image of deceased believers floating about the clouds on gossamer wings for all eternity is about as far from the truth as east is from west. God's word also describes scenes of loud-voiced worship around His throne, suggesting that the principal occupation of its inhabitants will be unbridled adoration and praise of God the Father and the Lamb.

But there is more that we *don't* know about life in God's eternity than what we *do* know—and if we were told, our earth-bound minds couldn't comprehend its other-worldly magnificence.

*"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared
for those who love him."
1 Corinthians 2:9 niv*

All we really need to remember is that, in Christ, *this* world is the alien place. It

may be pleasant, comfortable, even fulfilling. We may be surrounded by family and loved ones, and enjoy a life that we imagine cannot get any better. But no matter how satisfying this home is, for the believer it will never be more than a home away from home.

When I imagine heaven, my first thought is for the *grandeur*, the blinding brilliance of God's throne room. Here is what we know of it:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in

Mates For Life

*For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.
2 Corinthians 11:2*

There's something very sad about a cardinal lying dead in the snow. It's not uncommon for birds, disoriented by the reflection, to mistakenly slam into the windows of the house. Some are left stunned, shaking their head while they struggle to get their wind back, but some are left lifeless, often with broken necks as a result of the impact.

When any animal is killed in such a senseless manner it's a sad occasion, but there is something rather poignant about the death of a cardinal. Many of the winter snow birds crash into the windows, but they are always so many, all jumbled together into a faceless flock, that one or two left missing seems a small thing.

But the cardinals are always couples, male and female: the male resplendent in his brilliant scarlet, the female presenting a more subdued appearance. They are always together, mates—one never far away from the other.

So it was a disappointing site one winter when I discovered a male cardinal lying lifeless in the snow. He had struck the window on the second floor, broken his neck, and now his female no longer had her mate. She would search for him, expecting his return, but her searching would be in vain. He would never return.

Humans and animals alike must face the possibility of losing their mate. Nothing fills the belly of a devoted husband or wife with more dread than the prospect of losing his or her mate to death. It is something too painful even to contemplate.

In the imagery of God's Word, the believer is also a mate—part of the Bride of Christ: the church. The Bridegroom has gone away for a time, but He has promised to one day return for His bride. No one—not even He—knows the date when the wedding will take place, but it is certain—as certain as any of the promises of God.

Sickness will not postpone the ceremony, nor will death declare it canceled. We are already mates in Spirit; our devotion is deep and real. But there will come a day when our Mate will reveal Himself bodily, and we will be caught up with Him in the clouds, to dwell together forever.

As one.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7

heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

Revelation 4:2-6

The closest we come to experiencing that here on earth is a good old Midwestern thunderstorm. The storms, typically, have a slow beginning, moving from out of the west, from over the distant hills. The rain begins as a sprinkle, from the outer edges of the storm, then increases, until sheets of water are pouring down from a darkened sky.

Suddenly, like the grand finale of an Independence Day fireworks performance, the sky is alive with nonstop concussions and streams and explosions of white brilliance. The black air is supercharged with the destructive current of the heavens, turned white and silver, illuminated by its brilliance. One after the other, overlapping and stacked upon each other like nervous ferrets escaping a cage, the explosions beat against the air, beat against the house, beat against our fragile sense of safety within its walls.

Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard and said: "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."

2 Chronicles 20:5-6 niv

One is never so small as when confronted by the power of heaven. A night sky exploding with superheated bolts of lightning is sufficient to reduce the largest ego to insignificance. No mere human can stand against these forces. Yet, for the believer, this is not a moment to be feared, but a moment of praise and awe for a God who rises so high above His people. He is magnificence and might; He is unlimited power and majesty, and no one can stand against Him.

The believer takes comfort in the knowledge that this incredible, majestic God is also—at the same time—his loving, merciful Father, in whom he has been granted security and peace.

The second thing that comes to mind, when I consider the promise God has made to me for my eternity, is His amazing creativity. Heaven—no matter what it turns out to be—will be something too fantastic for any mere mortal to have imagined.

My fault and my fate is to be an incurable romantic. Where others see a squirrel burying acorns for the winter, I see nature's epochal struggle for survival. Where others see only the inconvenience of accumulated snow and ice, I see the sublime subtleties of God's crystalline palette. Where others see the loss of chlorophyll in the leaves of summer and their inevitable littering of the ground, I see signs of a fading year sprinkled liberally with the exuberant shades of heaven's glory.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. Romans 1:20

And there's the rub. An energetic and creative God has gone out of His way to reveal Himself in the components of His handiwork. He has surrounded all my senses with the beauty of His mind and hand. Yet often the result is only an unrequited longing in my breast, and a sensation of being in the wrong place at the wrong time—a feeling of belonging not to the low or to the high, but to neither.

I cannot yet reach up into heaven. I cannot yet soar with the angels or kneel and worship alongside the Elders. I do not yet tread the soft pathways of gold that crisscross my God's home. But neither can I be at peace in a place of earth and mortal impermanence. At times this flesh is only a cumbersome cloak—odd apparel for my God-tinged spirit.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" 1 Kings 8:27

That which displays the handiwork and personality of the Father must remain, until The Day, only a beckoning foretaste of what lies ahead. As God in my mind can only be a faint, gossamer surrogate for the more substantial glory of His literal presence, the glory of His earthly creation cannot compare to the wondrous mysteries of my eventual home.

So I make the visual riches of His grace into a promissory note. He has promised me life everlasting in the now-unimaginable wonder of His presence. For the moment, because I am still small and earth-bound, I take comfort in a small foretaste of that wonder. All around me glows the beauty of His creation: the woods, the luxurious plains, the beasts of the field. The changes in each new season offer a hint of the changes that will take place once I pass through His gates.

The beauty of this world is a sight at once uplifting and melancholy—a pleasant experience tinged with homesickness.

But it will do for now.

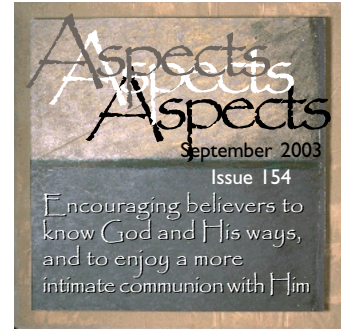
Notes:

1: From "In the Name of the Lord," by Phil McHugh, Gloria Gaither, and Sandi Patti Helvering.

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