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Spiritual Formation

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*Hind's Feet in High Places: Analysis and Reaction*

In order to understand Hannah Hurnard's book *Hind's Feet in High Places*, the reader has to understand what an allegory is. According to *Dictionary.com*, an allegory is a story that represents a spiritual or abstract meaning through the use of concrete or material forms. It is "a symbolic narrative." It is easy to see this working in the first chapter where Most Afraid works for the Chief Shepherd. Obviously, Most Afraid represents those who are afraid to commit to Christ. The Chief Shepherd is Christ Himself who encourages her to make a commitment to a Christian way of living.

In the first chapter, Most Afraid is disfigured and crippled who lives in the Valley of Humiliation. She is about to be married off to her cousin Craven Fear. She seeks a way out of this marriage by appealing to the Chief Shepherd for advice about how to live in the high places. Basically, He tells her that she must allow love in her heart. Hesitant, she says that love brings pain, but at last she decides to follow His ways. He promises that even if He is not by her side, He will always be with her. This is proven when she is assaulted by her cousin on her way home and the Shepherd appears by her side. This chapter is full of symbols for how we are. Most Afraid gets her name from being afraid to let love in her heart. She is afraid of the pain that loving can cause as so many of us are. She is crippled by this fear and also by sin which holds us back from being one with God. The Chief Shepherd for whom she works is Christ who stands

beside us and will protect us when trouble comes our way. Most Afraid struggles just like a real human to open her heart to God.

Chapters 2 and 3 are about how Much Afraid feels when she awakens the next morning. At first she is joyous remembering how she made a commitment to the Chief Shepherd, but soon after she is surrounded by her relatives who try to persuade her to marry Craven. When she resists, she is strangled and faints. When she wakes up she calls for help from her next-door neighbor who saves her. She regrets not following the Shepherd when he called. The next day she seeks him and finds him waiting for her. I think these chapters are about how we can stray from God. The family represents temptations that we face, temptations to sin or to ignore God. Asking for help when we face these from true friends is a good idea. When Much Afraid goes out to find the Chief Shepherd the next day, she finds Him waiting for her. This is a symbol of how God's love for us is steadfast.

In chapter 4, Much Afraid learns a few lessons from the Chief Shepherd. She learns that all of God's creations are useful. She realizes this when she sees the wildflowers that appear to have no real purpose. As a result of having love in her heart, she is able to perceive nature differently. She is told that the greatest victories are those no one knows about. Finally she is given two companions to help her on her journey: Sorrow and Suffering. She is hesitant about these two because she thinks that they are bad companions to make a journey with. I think that this chapter shows us that love of God changes the way we see the world. It opens us to new ways of living. As for the victories, this means that we do not have to be saints or be recognized as loving God. Even if our struggle is private, it still has meaning. Finally, having Sorrow and Suffering go on the journey with her shows that these two feelings can make us closer to God. In chapter 5, the family decides that they will try again to get Much Afraid to come back to them. They send Pride

to lure her back. Luckily, the Shepherd comes to her rescue and defeats Pride. This is the lesson that if we are proud, we cannot truly love God. In order to be close to God, we must be humble. We must put ourselves second to His commands. After this Much Afraid continues on her journey.

In chapter 6 Much Afraid is scared because the path now leads through the desert and away from the High Places. The Shepherd tells her that all His servants must travel through the desert. With this, she sees Biblical figures who have traveled through the desert. Of course, the desert symbolizes that we all go through times of doubt in our journey to God. The Shepherd also shows her different grains being ground for bread. Each type of grain is prepared differently. This is a symbol that people are brought to God through different experiences. Much Afraid accepts her new life at the end of the chapter. Chapter 7 describes how this acceptance changes her. For one thing, she is no longer crippled. This symbolizes that once we accept God into our lives, we are changed forever. We are new people, born again in His spirit. We no longer have to be crippled by sin and self-doubt. After passing through the desert, Much Afraid is reawakened to the beauty of the world in chapter 8. I think this means that after suffering, we can appreciate the goodness of God even more because He is steadfast in his love for us. We realize that although we were in the desert, He was always by our side.

At the beginning of chapter 9, Much Afraid begins to ascend to the High Places. This is a symbol for being in God's presence and living one's life devoted to doing His will. She is taken over by doubt about her ability to climb the steep path and is distrustful of finding a way through the mountains. Eventually she puts her doubts aside and discovers that she can indeed climb the steep cliffs. This shows that we must believe that God will find a way to help us accomplish our

goal of dwelling in His love. In chapter 10 Much Afraid learns the lesson of Forgiveness from a flower she had never before seen. Soon after she meets the Shepherd Himself.

Much Afraid is still concerned in chapter 11 about her ability to make the journey to the High Places. Her feet seem crippled. She shares these fears with the Shepherd who consoles her and tells her that she will find herself able to face the things she fears. She must have trust. As she continues her journey she finds herself able to fight off the doubts that attack her. The chapter ends with her feeling optimistic about her future. This is a lesson that we should not dread the things that will happen in our lives. With God by our side, we will be able to deal with them as they come. In chapter 12, Much Afraid feels she is not making much progress up the mountain to the High Places. Once again, the Shepherd comes to her and gives her encouragement, so that she is able to continue on her way. When we have doubts, we can share them with God through prayer and He will offer us solace.

In chapter 13, Much Afraid wonders if she had been right to follow the Shepherd since He demands so much of her. However, when she imagines a life without the Shepherd, she is seized with despair. What meaning would life have without a God? Although following the way of God is hard, having a life without a God in it is even harder. When she reaches the outskirts of the High Places in chapter 14, Much Afraid realizes that not everyday is perfect even near to God's kingdom. I think this means that even if we are devoted to God and follow His path, there will still be days when we are sad or despairing. However, after the tears of night will come joy in the morning. For those who follow God's way do not live in sadness forever.

In chapter 15, the land is racked by floods and Much Afraid and her companions take shelter from the waters. Much Afraid wonders if the Shepherd has kept His promise to her. Taking out the stones she has collected on her journey, she thinks of tossing them away because she doesn't

feel the promises have been kept. As she holds each one in her hand, she recalls the testing of people in the Bible and realizes that God has kept His promises to her. Soon the water abates and they safely go on. In chapter 16, Much Afraid is taken over by Bitterness and made to wonder if God is going to desert her. I think we all feel this way sometimes, even those people who are most devoted Christians. There are times when everyone -- even saints -- wonder about God's standing by them. So I don't think that it's surprising that Much Afraid has doubts.

Chapter 17 finds Much Afraid by the healing streams. When she glances into the streams, she sees that her disfigured face has healed. Of course, the way God heals us is not physically obvious, so this is a symbol of the healing that takes place inside of us. By the end of the book, Much Afraid is able to leap to the highest places on her hinds' feet completing the journey she undertook at the beginning of the book. She dwells there in the presence of God along with Grace and Glory, Joy and Peace.

I really liked the way this book combined verses and events from the Bible to tell the story of a person who makes a commitment to God. I definitely could understand the symbolism and relate to the doubts that Much Afraid had. The book was easy to read and understand, but it told a familiar story: how difficult it is to embrace the way of God, but that God will stand by you every step of the way. You are never alone on the journey.