

THE MOUNTAIN AND MOON-LIT VALLEY

Written on July 5, 2007 by Elder Brian Johnson

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” - *Psalms 23:1-6*

Have you ever met someone who seemed to be solid as a rock? They are inspiring on the mountaintops of life and in the valleys that seem so deep. Over the past three years, I have been able to watch a man who has shown me Jesus. He has feet of clay, a pure heart and a mind illuminated by the Word of God. Aren't we all looking for someone who is the essence of God's Word walking around in the flesh of human existence?

Let me tell you what Jesus looks like to me from an outsider's point of view. He's about 5-6, 70 years of age, gray-headed, and almost always wears a smile wherever he is at. He doesn't seem like much to many people, but they haven't seen the grace inside His heart. Almost 50 years ago, he married a precious lady who loved the Lord as well. They had planned to live a long life together and had many dreams I suppose. They were in love. The 40-50 year old pictures that are displayed around their home speak clearly about a vibrant love. They were not perfect, having feet of clay, but did their best to love as God would.

These mountain peaks of life were filled with precious moments of two children, serving their local church (she taught the beginner's SS class, he is a deacon), and four grandchildren. The world wants to stay on the mountains of pure pleasure, but life is mixed with pain in the valleys to make us stronger, grow our patience and purify our love. About 18 years ago, the descent into the valley began when the doctor told him to be watching his wife for signs of Alzheimer's. She began going through the stages of slight memory loss, to much forgetfulness, anger at her husband for no reason, and then calm as a little child and bed-ridden. The disease became apparent about 12 years ago and continued to deteriorate her body until Monday morning.

The one who had loved her husband so much was now forgetting him. The one who loved her children and grandchildren to death was now unable to communicate with them. Her last trip to church, according to her pastor, was 6-7 years ago. The children she used to teach were growing up in the truth and surpassing her in knowledge that she had forgotten. About 5-years ago, she quit talking to anyone. Can you imagine the pain and suffering that a husband and best friend for so many years must have felt? I am sure that it was hard to bear, but love compelled him to go another mile. Many marriages today would seek a divorce before caring for their spouse to this degree, yet grace he had received in Jesus Christ carried him through.

Every day he told her he loved her, fed her, cleaned her and stood by her side. Her last words to him 4-5 years ago were, “I love you, too!” This marriage was not 50-50 as the world says. It was 100%-100% on both sides. Even if the other spouse can't give anything back, by God's grace, we are commanded to love God and our neighbor completely, entirely and unconditionally. My friend did just that. From the moment he spoke his first vows around 21 years of age (she was 16) until Monday morning at 5:45AM when she took her last breath, he was faithful and true to the promise that he made.

There are many people who will tell you how to live your life, but the greatest teacher of all is seeing someone live through the experience. Actions speak louder than words. Maybe, that is why this man seems to be so great in my eyes. Actually, he seems so great because of the God that he serves. He stands close to Mt. Calvary where Jesus died for the ungodly when we were without strength and his walk through the valley of the shadow of death is filled with the light of the moon (the church) as it reflects the glory of the Son. As the nation was celebrating its birth with fireworks, fellowship and fun, my friend was standing beside the casket of his wife whose new freedom had just begun...