



NEW DIRECTION Mustard Seed

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Dear Friends,

Each of us have a refrain of a song or two from our childhoods, whether melodious or discordant. Some memories are as a breeze and free laughter on a summer day; some as trapped in a dark storm. My personal refrains, so woven into the fiber of my being from a tiny tot, were from the opera, *Porgie and Bess* .

“It ain’t necessarily so; it ain’t necessarily so; the things that you are liable to read in the Bible, it ain’t necessarily so.”

And another:

“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child; sometimes I feel like a motherless child; sometimes I feel like a motherless child; a long way from home; a long way from home.”

We lived on New Direction Farm (Christian therapeutic boarding school) from 1997-2014 with lots and lots of teenagers. Some of these kids were trapped in their own personal, discordant refrains from childhood. Others had wonderful, safe childhoods and now longed to go back to those days before life became difficult and painful and they became snared in emotions. Some admitted, “I just want to go back to kindergarten. Life was good and easy and not much expected.”

Also on that farm was a flock of sheep. Being a first-hand observer of the sheep provided vivid instruction regarding the parallel between we humans and the nature of sheep. Our bent is to be prone to wander. And just as are sheep, we will be insidiously ruled by fear if not entrusting our care into the hands and lead of a safe Shepherd whom we trust.

People were so excited about a place of healing for youth being started we were given not an animal or two, but herds of animals: sheep, Scottish Highland cattle, Texas Longhorn cattle, goats and eventually horses. Quite comical if you think about the fact we were city people the Lord placed upon that high mountain. Tending to a cat and dog was as far as a stretch we had ever encountered up until the move.

It was in those days of watching the flock of sheep first arrive at the farm I was able to witness, first hand, what a truly fearful sheep looks like. Reeling from being torn from what was familiar to this new strange land the eight of them were plastered up against the back wall of the cab as one shivering mass of white fur. Fearful sheep either impulsively run often in a direction not safe. Or they dig in. These dug in with all their might. It took hours to get them from the truck to the small enclosed pasture 10 or so feet away. Each, immediately took position in a far corner, once again creating a quivering, nose to nose, rear ends to the world formation.



Ever so gradually the sheep began to trust the voice of my husband as he would come several times a day to feed and care for them. The foundation of a relationship was being formed. The day came when it

was time to lead the crew to a greener pasture up the road. A friend had given us a shepherd's staff which gave the appearance of a bona fide shepherd. Quite expecting the sheep would line up like well-trained first graders Dave opened the gate and with staff in hand began stepping forward. The sheep, on the other hand, either ran amuck outside the fence or dug in refusing to move outside of what had become their safe haven. Hours later, they were all safely tucked into their new green pasture. And so the beat went on until the flock attuned their heartstrings to following the cue of the shepherd. There was one, however, who became known as the prodigal sheep. Once secure in a new pasture he would wait until the shepherd was out of sight. Taking a running bolt he would plow, head first through barbed wire to get outside and run around. As I said we were city people who eventually learned this is not suitable fencing for sheep. After a while he decided he wanted back with his tribe and would then bolt back in. Just picture this guy with ripped fur, bloody scars. A pitiful sight indeed. Reminds me of the state of so many of the teens when they arrived on the mountain for restoration.

I would imagine there is no scripture more recited during times of testing or death than psalm 23. One would have to be of such hard heart to not receive a dose of well-being upon hearing. A few years back an artist asked if I would like to have her work up a print of psalm 23 to be framed and placed on the walls of all of the bedrooms here at the ministry home where guests stay. Sounded like a wonderful idea to me. The day of the revealing of her masterpiece arrived. As I read the psalm I realized she had left out verses 4 -5 which speak of the valley of the shadow of death and preparing a table in the presence of my enemies. She said she likes scattering only good thoughts rather than those that are troubling. She felt those verses needed to be removed in order for guests to feel safe when they lay their head down for the night. Needless to say if we cut and paste scripture to suit our own needs we will inevitably err on the side of wrong.

Those of us who have come to understand the presence of our all-powerful Shepherd as we have walked through dark shadowed valleys as well as encountered all matter of evil at the hands of foes find a total balance of our need to be lovingly cared for and protected by Our good and Faithful Shepherd.

There is a saying “When something bad happens you have three choices. You can either let it define you; let it destroy you; or you can let it strengthen you” What a blessing it is to now be walking in relationship with single mothers who are clients of the Mustard Seed Project. The majority of them had very painful childhoods which became the trajectory for unhealthy relationships as teenagers and adults, which begot children now entrenched in painful childhoods... BUT GOD intervened. In each of their time lines, came a time in which they were blessed to realize God’s plan was not for them to remain in bondage but to be set free. This could not happen independently of Jesus Christ. Most of them greatly identify with the ripped fur prodigal sheep. But now they are able to testify of the freedom that comes from “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” John 10:27 We say these women have grit; tenacity to push toward a vision of a future for themselves and their children that involves thriving and living above circumstances rather than surviving and under the shambled remains of the past. They are willing to do the hard work but acknowledge there are burdens far too great for them to bear alone.

Here is a brief overview of what is happening with the Mustard Seed Project: We have three separate cases going before judges this month. One a woman who was kicked out of her home by her husband 9 months ago and upon returning found the locks had been changed. This has been a loooooooong suffering season of difficulty for this woman. But, as we have found to always be the case, for those who turn toward rather than away from the Lord, this time of being hemmed in has served to set her free rather than to entrap. The other is a custody battle for two little boys. Their mother fled with them a little over a year ago due to domestic violence. Like many this was the seventh time she left only this time it was for good. She now lives in an apartment, has a good vehicle, a job that is paying more than she formerly made, is involved in her church..... She has been plucked up out of the muck and the mire and has a new song on her heart. The third is custody battle over a little girl.

There are other cases either just now finishing up or also going to court before long. There are some women with whom we are extensively walking, providing financial supplementation while they finish college courses and work. We consistently tell them we are investing in the future of them and their children. Some, with whom we had been working for the past two years, are now on the other side of the investment. And we are now able to witness them spread their wings and successfully fly. We cannot imagine any greater joy than to be walking alongside these ladies.

It takes time to replace old refrains. Those from my childhood used to create a lost, woeful emotion of abandonment. These words were wrapped in the experience of living in a family that believed in the rigid rituals of religion absent from the Word of God and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This along with having parents operating out of the brokenness of their own unrestored childhoods created a generational chain. Children who are parented by parents who are constantly distracted by their own emotional issues and unable to comfort and soothe with assurance of “all is well I am present with you” will often find themselves learning how to tackle the world all alone. I reflect back upon some of the huge obstacles I encountered seemingly all alone. And am now thankful to have had those experiences as they were used to forge my destiny into one day being rescued by the One Who richly provides for all of my needs, sets an intimate table in the presence of my enemies, lays me down in green pastures and anoints my wounds with oil. This was when I came to know that I know that I know that it is “necessarily so. The things that I’m liable to read in the Bible. They are necessarily and undeniably so and true.”

Each of us have refrains from our past. Those of us who are most blessed now operate from a blessed assurance of there being One Who is greater than all.....loves us with an everlasting love.....and sings over us.

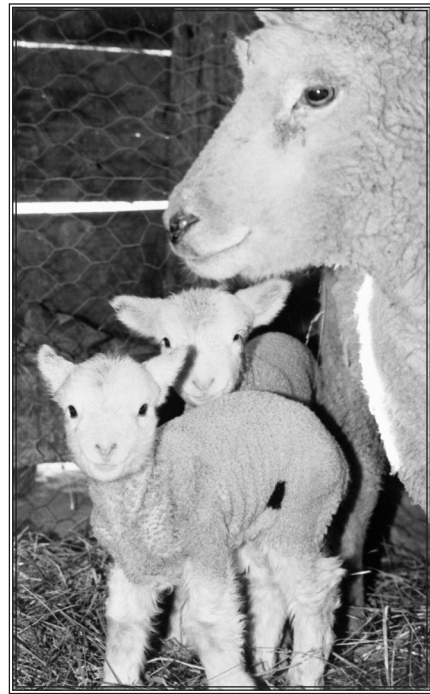
Thank you for Investing in the Mustard Seed Flock

Bridget, Dave and Joel

“All the way my Savior leads me. What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my Guide? All the way my Savior leads me. Cheers each winding path I tread. Gives me grace for every trial. Feeds me with the Living Bread. You lead me and keep me from falling. You carry me close to Your heart. And surely your goodness and mercy will follow me.

All the way my Savior leads me. Oh the fullness of His love. Oh the sureness of His promise in the triumph of His blood. And when my spirit clothed immortal wings its flight to realms of day. This my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way.”

Chris Tomlin



www.newdirectionmustardseed.com

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