

Forty Days
In The Wilderness

June 21-July 31

A Story of Pride and Humility

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Proverbs 3:34 (NIV)

*“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand,
that He may lift you up in due time.”*

I Peter 5:6 (NIV)

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On June 21, my wife and I left for Colorado. This was the latest in a series of rapid changes that began for me when my first wife died a few years ago and accelerated after I remarried.

After the initial shock waves rolled through our family and friends, I found myself dealing with one significant change after another. It was traumatic to leave my home with the friends and surroundings I had come to enjoy. Next, I ended years of teaching a wonderful Sunday School Class and said, “Goodbye”, to a myriad of longtime friends at a church I enjoyed. The pressure continued as I immersed myself into my wife’s world at her church and on to Texas to meet with her children and later her introduction to our family, including visiting one of our daughters in another state.

The last big change was to keep my agreement to try and go for two months this summer to the home my wife and her former husband had built some 25 years ago in Colorado. As the departure date came nearer, I became increasingly apprehensive and nervous for several reasons, including:

- My mother’s near death experience at altitude when she was age 85.
- My first wife’s need to suddenly come home from Colorado because of altitude.
- My 85th birthday spent in a hospital in New Mexico because of the altitude and my drinking too much liquid.
- My recent diagnosis for high blood pressure and no medicine yet that worked.

In addition, the car and the cabin had belonged to my new wife and her former husband, and I knew no one where we were going.

After taking four leisurely days to come up to 8600', we arrived at the mountain cabin on June 25. It seemed "his" presence and "his" name were everywhere—pictures, carvings, signs on the garage and front porch, fishing gear, clothing, hats, tools, etc. This was the town the two of them had made their own—including many, many, wonderful friends and memories—and where they had spent 4-5 months a year, including Jeeping and snowmobiling.

The result was that I felt alone, out of place and a virtual extension or male replacement for her former husband.

By the time we went through the ritual of the July 4th parade with her old group at her house, and meeting a horde of new faces and names and going to many of her old friends' homes, her old church, her art association and theater groups, the feeling of being alone and out of place only intensified.

On the morning of July 12, I felt disoriented and nauseated. I sensed it was the blood pressure problem. We went to the Medical Clinic and found I was at 200+ /100+. For the next few weeks we worked through various meds and the stomach distress that seemed to accompany them.

I felt from the beginning of our relationship that I was to come out to Colorado to know more of my wife's history, and that God wanted to teach me something. As you will see, I was right.

I did not expect it to be easy, and that also proved to be right. When my wife offered to have me make the cabin over with my things instead of theirs, I said, "*No!*" It was their place and their environment, and I did not believe it was for me to change. My only possessions were a few clothes in a small closet and my computers. It became clear that I was to voluntarily let go of everything, so God could start me with a fresh new slate.

I realized later that it was a time of "*fasting*". In a small, much less significant way, it reminded me of Moses and Jesus as they spent

time alone with God on Mt Sinai and the Mount of Temptation. Although I was only dealing with my own ego, I, too, felt alone in the mountains, as I separated from all that was familiar and gave me a sense of belonging, and spent the next several weeks without much of what I felt was important in this world.

Most of all I missed the “*people*”—family and friends back home. Next were my “*possessions*”—home, automobile and everything else I owned except a few clothes and my computers. More subtle was the loss of “*position*”—I felt like a person without a history since no one knew me or cared what I had been or done. And since I was trying to overcome the high blood pressure and stomach distress I went on a rather strict diet—eliminating many of my favorite “*foods*” that I had enjoyed over the years.

I was thoroughly down and licking my wounds. I wanted in the worst way to head back home! Yet I knew it was important to persevere and work through it, if I wanted God to have His way rather than me satisfying my immediate wants. My wife sensed how miserable I was and offered to go home any time, but I told her I felt it was important that we stay through the summer.

On July 31, just 40 days after we had left Wichita for Colorado, we talked about the difficulties I was experiencing. It quickly became clear that both of us had *independently* reached the same conclusion: God was teaching me *humility!* He was taking away everything that had given me confidence and position. We both felt He was stripping me and leaving me only Himself for my strength and wellbeing.

That was a turning point! Over the next few days, I found myself no longer concentrating on all the negatives. Instead, I began recounting with joy and wonder the good things that God had been substituting during these weeks away.

The list was almost endless, including:

- Mountains and drives
- Streams and walks
- Cool and rain
- Excellent Clinic and people
- Control of High Blood Pressure with low dosage
- My wife's former life and habitat unfolded
- Bucks, does and fawns in our yard and street
- Art Center/Local artists
- Small town life and community
- A mountain city charm and wooden boardwalks
- Churches
- Bible Studies
- Small town Grocery
- Small town Bakery
- 4th of July Celebration
- My 87th Birthday Celebration
- Celebrate end of WWII on August 15
- Having a local artist paint our WWII plane
- Jeep trips visits with friends

The greatest blessings of all were the people. Names of her longtime friends now became connected with faces and personalities. They were now my friends, too!

Today is August 13. Our time in Colorado is coming to an end. We leave for home two weeks from today. We both are ready and content to go. I do not know if I (or either of us) will ever return. Only God knows the future. We will simply wait and see how He directs.

Of one thing we are certain: We both want God's will in our lives more than having our own way. So now we head home and walk with Him and one another into whatever He has planned for us.

It is good to come down from the mountains, knowing we let God have His way. Romans 8:28 (NIV) is right.

*“And we know that in all things God works
for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.”*

I can't wait to see what He does next!

A Grateful Old Man