

Ascent

By Abigail Rayn



*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Psalm 139:7-12 NIV

I am deathly afraid of heights. I am talking viscerally terrified. Along with it, the sister fear of extreme depths. In my case, it is a package deal. So I was extraordinarily interested to learn about the deepest place on Earth, the Challenger Deep of the Mariana Trench. Located in the Pacific Ocean, southeast of Japan, 36,000 feet (about seven miles) below sea level. On May 13, 2019 US explorer Victor Vescovo journeyed twelve hours descending and exploring the deepest place on Earth. He traveled in a specially designed sub built to withstand

22 tons of pressure. Prior to that, on May 24, 2010, he had ascended to the highest place on Earth, 29,029 feet to Mount Everest. Thus, he is recognized by the Guinness World Records as the first person to scale the greatest vertical distance without leaving the Earth's surface.

While this mortal man has had such great achievements as an explorer, it is nothing compared to our great and magnificent God and His steadfastness to be with us no matter where we are. Recently while on vacation I hiked in Kentucky's Mammoth cave. At the deepest point, 283 feet below the surface, our tour guide turned off the lights and we found ourselves in complete and utter darkness momentarily. I couldn't imagine the early explorers being in that place and ever surviving. I personally experienced a new and heightened awareness of this Psalm as I had never known. Even in the depths of those caves and a darkness as I had never experienced before, though I could not see God...He was there, and the darkness was not dark to Him.

There is absolutely no place on earth, not the great Mammoth Cave, not even the depths of the Mariana Trench that God cannot find us when we're lost or lonely. He promises His *hand will guide us if we settle on the far side of the sea*. Victor depended on specialized instruments and a highly trained team of experts to guide him safely in these expeditions. Our God doesn't need such technology or experts; He does it all with only his right hand.

There have been times when I have felt as though I were living in my own "Mariana Trench." Times of depression when days were darker than a starless night sky. When panic and fears felt as real as 22 tons of pressure sucking the air from my lungs. During those times I tried to hide from everyone and everything, including the light of day and even God's light. I remember wishing I could fly far, far away like a migrating bird. I contemplated options to escape, but none seemed sufficient.

True to His promise, God was there with me even in my darkest depths. I couldn't hide from Him. He pulled me out of the depths of despair and set my feet back on solid ground. He eventually restored my joy. His right hand held me fast. He brought me back into His glorious light.

I look to the Bible Greats to strengthen my faith when doubts creep in: Gideon in fear hid in an underground winepress to thresh his wheat, Jonah in rebellion ended up in the belly of a fish and Elijah walked into the desert to die, yet in all their situations, God knew where they were the entire time and met them there.

Inevitably I know there will be dark days, days when clouds block the sun's rays and the darkness overwhelms. But in those moments, I must recall what I know to be true and lean not on my own understanding, but the true and steadfast word of God. The truth that God is always there even when I can't see Him in the

moment. Eventually the dark storm clouds will roll away. The Light will always overcome the darkness.

Then, after we come out from these depths, God invites us to soar to even new heights, to ascend to even greater places than we can imagine. Places of freedom, safety, forgiveness, restoration, healing and hope.

Thank you, Lord that there is no place on earth that is too impossible for you to rescue me. There is no place on earth and nothing that I can ever do that I will ever be out of your reach... *You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Psalm 139:1-6*