

“Look Up”

Ephesians 3:14-21
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I have had the honor, privilege, and joy to take several people on their first backpacking trip. I have shared with them the joy of looking up. The tendency is to look down at the path. Backpacking is boring if you only occasionally see the scenery. The spectacular, magnificence of God's creation is seen from a different perspective with every step. With practice, one learns to see the path with peripheral vision, feel the path with one's feet, and keep one's steps nimble to adjust for poor foot placement. I do not take any time-telling devices and resist calculating distance covered, which enables me to live in the present, letting the wonderful beauty permeate me. I apply the same approach to my biking. Instead of fixating on my cyclometer, I look up at the scenery and listen to the rhythm of my body.

Looking up is vital to abundant life. I can easily get lost in a train of unproductive thought, worry, fear, and negative assumptions. Looking up enables me to celebrate my blessings. I can easily get lost in the details, my to do list, and perfectionism. Looking up enables me to give thanks for the goodness all around me. I can easily get lost in the drudgery of a difficult day, the frustration of shattered dreams, the exasperation of a strained relationship, and the weariness of battling health issues. Looking up enables me to imagine God's grace transforming these situations. I can easily get lost in negative news. Looking up enables me to savor good news.

The apostle Paul prays for each of us to look up. **Ephesians 3:16 NLT “I pray that from God's glorious, unlimited resources God will empower you with inner strength through the Holy Spirit.”** Look up, take a walk, marvel in the fall colors. Look up in awe at the stars. Look up at harmony of music. Look up at the exquisiteness of art. Look up at the smell of a rose. Look up at the taste of a delicious meal. Look up at the sensation of a warm blanket. Look up praising God for your blessings. Look up sensing the Holy Spirit refocusing your heart, soul, and mind on the empowerment of God's glorious, unlimited resources.

Mr. Rogers said, “I believe that human beings are God's vessels of mystery and beauty.” Look up at your family and friends. Look up to celebrate with them. Look up to laugh, play, and delight with them. Look up to see beyond the ugliness of humanity to the goodness, mystery, and beauty in every person. Look up, sensing the Holy Spirit connecting you through relationships to empower you with God's glorious, unlimited resources.

When we look down, we get confused, are blinded by obstacles, led astray by misconceptions, misunderstand God's will, feel there is a limit to grace, waver in our hope that love is supreme and doubt that resurrection will transform all to glorious perfection. When we look down, we end up doing things that we think are God's will, but in reality are the opposite of God's will.

Abraham misunderstood thinking to have a son he needed to have sex with Hagar instead of his wife, Sarah. This misunderstanding has caused thousands of years of strife and murders between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. God enabled Abraham to look up to discover God's desire was to bless Abraham with a loving marriage, a son, a world where everyone is a part of one loving family.

Later Abraham misunderstood again. In the days of Abraham, it was tradition to sacrifice your firstborn son to God, so Abraham started thinking that was probably what God wanted. Abraham looked up to discover that God's will is for parents to love, nurture, and empower their children.

Moses misunderstood thinking God abandoned people to slavery. Moses went for a walk, looked up at an effervescent bush to discover God is leading all people into freedom.

Priests misunderstood thinking God wants scapegoats and animal sacrifice. Priests looked up to discover God is grace, freely forgives, and desires life for all of creation.

Religious leaders misunderstood thinking God wants strict adherence to the letter of the law. Religious leaders looked up to discover God wants us to love freely.

People misunderstood thinking someone's plight, illness, or dire circumstances were brought about by that person's sin, lack of faith, or unbelief. Jesus taught them to look up to discover that God's desire is to fill each person with joy regardless of their choices or beliefs.

How are we looking down as a country? How are we looking down as a church? How are you looking down as a person? How is God inviting our country to look up, to discover, to be empowered with God's glorious, unlimited resources? How about our church? How is God inviting you to look up, to discover, to be empowered with God's glorious, unlimited resources?

The Apostle Paul said, **Ephesians 3:14-19** **"When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to God the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from God's glorious, unlimited resources God will empower you with inner strength through the Holy Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in God. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."**

The story is told of an English pub filled with drinkers who were seeking refuge from a raging storm. The proprietor was glad to have his establishment packed with paying customers. He was thankful the renovations were complete and appreciating the wall he painted with soothing, fresh paint. In the midst of all the melee of people moving around, a waitress came along with a tray, holding it high with cups of thick, dark ale. Suddenly, a patron stepped back, bumped the waitress, and jostled the tray sending the drinks flying splattering all over the wall. The proprietor looked down in anger. The wall he just painted now looked awful. The careless patron looked down ashamed for bumping the waitress. The waitress looked down humiliated by her circumstances, frustrated by lost tips, and dreading the anger of the proprietor. The crowd looked down overwhelmed by the thick haze of chaos, a ruined wall, hurt people, a destructive storm, and shattered dreams. One person looked up, stood up, and said, "If you will permit me, perhaps I can do something about that." She stepped forward and opened a case she was carrying. The people watching saw that in the case were brushes, charcoals and paints. She went to work on the wall that was stained with all this mess. She sketched with charcoal, then painted. The crowd looked up in awe as a masterpiece took shape. The ruined wall was transformed into inspiring art. The proprietor looked up smiling at his good fortune to have an artist transform his wall. The waitress looked up gleaming as the tips once again flowed. The bumping patron looked up delighting that it all worked out in the end.

We are able to look up when we invite Jesus to be at home in our heart, trusting in God, trusting in love, trusting in joy. For Jesus to be at home in our heart, we need to do some cleaning. Letting go of hate, fear, worry, mistakes, shame, guilt, failures, so we can look up to imagine how God's love is transforming us. When we continually make a home for God, in our hurt we look up to discover our belonging to God's family, we realize we are rooted in God's family tree.

The apostle Paul said, **Ephesians 3:14-21 NLT** **"When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to God the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from God's glorious, unlimited resources God will empower you with inner strength through the Holy Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in God. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through God's mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen."**

Our looking down, our misunderstandings, restrict our imagination. Since the beginning of time, humanity has looked down, limiting love. God is constantly inviting and empower us to look up, to receive love, to share love, and imagine all that God's love will do. Love and joy will expand for eternity.

When U2's Bono was asked how he has the energy and passion to look up advocating for global justice. He replied, "You have to dream out loud and in full color."

Our stewardship is to look up. Paul wrote and prayed today's scripture while suffering in prison with execution looming over him. Paul looked up with eyes of faith to discover the glory emanating from God transforming our humanscape into a realm of complete glory.

Like the multitude that has journeyed this earth before us, we are invited to look up from repulsive, heart-sickening situations, to imagine the transformation of God's love. We are invited to partner with God.

Together we generously support a long list of compassionate people who are making earth more like heaven. Together we generously give of our time and talents to do Hands-On Mission. Together we generously give, so we can gather together pointing out the wonderful things God is doing in us and all around us. Together we generously give so we can unite, encourage each other to look up and join the Apostle Paul in praying for our imaginations to be inspired by love and enlarged with joy.

We join generous stewards around the world, from the beginning of time and for eternity into the future, in looking up to doing billions of trillions of loving tasks enabling our brothers and sisters to perceive more joyful love. When we look up, we are empowered with God's glorious, unlimited resources to see the glory of the coming of God's kingdom empowering us to invest ourselves in unpromising circumstances, bleak predicaments, and fractured relationships, because we sense that all is becoming perfectly whole by God's love. At times we will not have anything to show for our efforts, therefore our motivation comes from God's promise that every instant of love makes a difference, every instant of love brings more of heaven to earth, every instant of love endures forever.

In a sense looking up gives us triple vision. We see the need at hand. We see God leading us into abundant life. And we see how we are partnering with God in making everyone's pure dreams reality. Looking up empowers us to believe that God will heal us, solve our greatest problem, bring clarity to our most perplexing situation, answer our most troubling question, forgive our worst sin, provide peace to disperse our worst fear and fill us with compassion to vanish our most destructive hate. Joy flourishes when we look up to see our blessings and give blessing others.

Opportunities to lovingly bless others abound. It is easy to look down, to get overwhelmed by the needs, discouraged by slow progress, frustrated with backsliding, distracted by the chaos, saddened by the pain, depressed with the plight. Look up imagine the enormity of God's love redeeming all.

Our stewardship is to look up, love, rejoice, imagine the transformations of love, and to give. We give to sustain this family of faith, so we have worship that encourages us to look up and mission that connects us with others, so we can look up together. We gather to learn how to look up, to tell stories of looking up, to have music lift our ears, to have compassion elevate our heart, to have laughter soar our joy, to have love launch our imagination. Amen