

Let's Look up to the Lord Jesus!

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Proverbs 4:25-27

Let your eyes look directly ahead; fix your gaze straight in front of you. Carefully measure the paths for your feet, and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

John 6:40

This is my Father's will: That everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him to life on the last day.
 [International Standard Version]

We were all saved by the unconditional love and grace of the Lord Jesus so that we would be 'rewarded'. The whole Bible directs us about the way to reach this target. In particular, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews encourages all saved brothers and sisters and demands that they keep moving ahead. He also guarantees that they will unquestionably reach their goal.

The Lord Jesus Himself walked this way before us and now entered the glory which is far beyond our imagination. Jesus humbled Himself to experience all kinds of pain and suffering of human beings before He won the victory and was raised up to the glory of His Father. Thus, we can be convinced that eventually we will reach the same place. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews used a parable to explain this principle.

Imagine that a vessel is caught in a storm near a harbor and is in great danger of sinking. While all those on board are caught up in anxiety, one brave sailor manages to cast the anchor of the ship into the water. People on board would then begin to feel more secure seeing the anchor dropped into the safe harbor and their anxiety would melt away. Likewise, seeing that the Lord Jesus who is "the head of the church" is now in the heavenly kingdom, we, as His body, can be convinced that we will eventually enter the kingdom.

Hebrews 6:19-20

That hope, firm and secure like an anchor for our souls, reaches behind the curtain where Jesus, our forerunner, has gone on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Do we have a firm conviction that we will accomplish the purpose of the Lord's salvation? As a matter of fact, the Bible mentions the tragic possibility of 'failing to accomplish' this purpose. We were saved and were granted eternal life, which will never be lost. However, there is still a possibility that we fail to accomplish the purpose for which we were saved, and thus, we will not be rewarded. Are we succeeding in this respect? Or are we failing to accomplish it? Our success or failure depends on where we direct our gaze. It is extremely important to look solely up to the Lord Jesus instead of turning your eyes away to someone else.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

1. The Danger of putting your mind on other things.

I would like to start with a discussion of five wrong ways of viewing situations in our life. The first is to "look back over your shoulder."

Luke 9:62

Jesus told him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Israelites actually experienced this pitfall, as is mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament.

Psalms 78:41

They tested God again and again, provoking the Holy One of Israel.

Why couldn't the Israelites enter the land of Canaan stretching out in front of them, instead they were left to wander through the wilderness for forty years? Why couldn't they bear any fruit and why did they have no victory, joy, consolation, praise or gratitude? It was all because they looked back over their shoulder.

The heavy burden Paul carried in his mind for saved brothers and sisters was that those believers kept looking back. Paul had to write the epistle to the Galatians for this reason. Believers in Galatia, who had once accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, were beginning to look back over their shoulders. It didn't mean that they were pursuing worldly desires again, returning to Atheism or trying to forsake their faith in the Lord Jesus, but were turning back to legalistic

Judaism, which was cold and lifeless. Enthusiastic believers of Judaism encouraged those brothers and sisters who received the grace of the Lord Jesus to convert back to Judaism.

Brothers and sisters were called to share in the fullness of the Lord Jesus when they were saved by His grace. Had they returned to the lifelessness of Judaism, they would have never shared in this fullness. Their faith would have been far different from the spiritual life that the Lord wanted them to lead. Believers in the Galatia of these times kept looking back and did not seem to have any intention of moving forward. They remained at the same place. It was a serious problem for Paul whether brothers and sisters would move spiritually forward or backward. Paul wrote about his heartfelt desire and prayer, which was for them to advance and not look back.

Then, how about us? Aren't we looking back? When we do so, doubt arises, which gives the devil a chance to win our hearts. Every time we look back, we are actually denying the Lord Jesus. Let us always look ahead as we proceed.

The second wrong way of viewing things is to "look around in anxiety."

Isaiah 41:10

Don't be afraid, because I'm with you; don't be anxious, because I am your God. I keep on strengthening you; I'm truly helping you. I'm surely upholding you with my victorious right hand."

In the original Bible, this verse begins with "don't look around anxiously." In the Bible we use, it is simplified as "don't be afraid" or "don't be anxious". Then why do we look around with fear and anxiety so often?

Peter was one of those who looked around anxiously. While he was walking on the water, at the moment when he took his eyes off the Lord Jesus and looked around, he began to sink into the sea. It was the very moment when he looked in the wrong direction that he began to sink.

Matthew 14:28-31

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come on!" So Peter got down out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came to Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, "Lord, save me!" At once Jesus reached out his hand, caught him, and asked him, "You who have so little faith, why did you doubt?"

We can see from the Old Testament that the Israelites too looked around anxiously. After

escaping from Egypt, they encamped near the promised land of Canaan. They listened to the report of twelve spies who were sent to explore the land of Canaan. While ten of those spies looked around with anxiety and feared the giants living in the heavily fortified city of Canaan, the other two looked up to the Lord alone. After all, the Israelites believed the false report of the ten frightened spies and they could not enter the land of Canaan except the two spies (Numbers, Chapter 13 and 14).

We should never look around in anxiety. The Lord has already saved us. The Lord has been leading us all along. Of course, we suffer from various troubles and pains. However, we should not allow such ordeals and pains to tie us down and keep us away from obedience to the Lord. The Bible tells us to "let our eyes look directly ahead; fix our gaze straight in front of you" in the Proverbs 4:25.

The third wrong way of viewing things is to "have short-sighted thinking."

2 Corinthians 10:7

Look at the plain facts! If anyone is confident that he belongs to the Messiah, he should remind himself of this: Just as he belongs to the Messiah, so do we.

Very often we are preoccupied with present 'worries' and our lives are ruled by the anxiety and distress of each moment. When we become short-sighted and our eyes are fixed on the problems surrounding us, we will never be able to accomplish the purpose of the Lord. If you have "limited eye sight", you will end up being deprived of the glory of the Lord.

Very often, we look at the situation at hand and give ourselves up to despair. This is the short-sighted way of viewing things and it is our major weakness. We surely suffer from various pains and troubles; however, these do not mean the end of our lives. The problems surrounding us are obstacles to our progress and these are what are referred to in the sentence "everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us" in Hebrews, 12:1. Our present situation may be imposing a heavy burden on us, which makes us feel so hopeless and desperate. This is exactly the sin that entangles us. A short-sighted way of viewing things causes us danger, anguish and setbacks. Please look straight ahead with your spiritual eyes. The Bible tells us to "fix your attention on Jesus" in Hebrews 12:2.

Our present worries are insignificant when we view our life from the larger point of view. Our real concerns should revolve around the invisible spiritual reality rather than the worldly things our eyes see. We shouldn't be trapped in ordeals. Problems arise one after another in our life and they will never end. However, our problems are like "stomachaches";

which are not critical at all. The pains that the Lord Jesus suffered should be occupying our minds.

1 Peter 4:12-13

Dear friends, do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. Instead, because you are participating in the sufferings of the Messiah, keep on rejoicing, so that you may be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

The fourth wrong way is the “self-serving way of viewing things.”

Philippians 2:4-5

Do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others. Have the same attitude among yourselves that was also in the Messiah Jesus.

It is such a self-centered attitude to be concerned about only our own interests. It is not acceptable for those who are saved by Jesus to live a self-serving life. As a part of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are responsible for brothers looking away from Him or sisters who are stuck in sins. What is the point of this verse; “do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others”? When you face a particular problem, you do not need to worry about its impact on your life. Very often, we are prone to be apathetic about a situation unless it causes us some harm. However, when we see some brothers or sisters in this assembly suffering from worries, knowingly becoming disobedient to the Lord Jesus or looking away from the Lord, can we remain apathetic? We should not be concerned just about our own interests. It is a wrong attitude to simply care about yourself or to be concerned only with your own benefit. I must say that caring only about yourself is the quickest way to wreck your life.

The fifth wrong way of seeing things is to “analyze ourselves.”

Paul warned us repeatedly to avoid this in his epistles. If you keep watching inside yourself, you will be led to a spiritual dead end.

Why do we gaze into ourselves? Is it because we believe that there is something inside us which makes the Lord Jesus satisfied? Or do we want to please ourselves by looking at what we own? Whichever the true reason is, if we concentrate too much on our own life, it will lead us to distress and consequently, to despair. Nothing good dwells inside of us. We need to be aware of this fact. Let us not expect something righteous to come out of us. “Let your eyes look directly ahead; fix your gaze straight

in front of you (Proverbs 4:25).” Please fix your attention on the Lord Jesus.

So far, we have seen five wrong ways of seeing things, which are “looking back”, “looking around in anxiety”, “looking short-sightedly”, “looking at yourself alone” as well as “analyzing yourself”. Now, let's think about the blessing that comes when we look only at the Lord right in his eyes.

2. Blessing of Looking up to the Lord.

The choice of what to look at is extremely important for us. The author of “the Epistle to the Hebrews” explained the importance of paying respect to the privilege granted to the children of God and summarized it in this verse; “fix your attention on the Lord Jesus.” In the original language that the Bible was written, this verse, “fix your attention on the Lord Jesus”, has a stronger connotation which is to “look away from all other things and fix your gaze at Jesus alone.” We should avoid looking back at by-gones or being captivated by the worldly things surrounding us. Instead of just looking at your present concerns or gazing at yourself, let us keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus alone. The Lord is telling us to “let our eyes look directly ahead and fix our gaze straight in front of us.”

Where is the goal of our life placed? In which direction are our eyes directed? Are we taking a real look at heavenly goals? Or are we focusing our eyes on earthly or worldly ones? If our eyes are looking into heavenly things, it will give us strength to drive our faith forward. The secret of spiritual growth is to set our eyes toward heaven.

“Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.” What is this verse trying to tell us? Let us learn the intention of the Lord God and his purpose from His words and the Holy Spirit's. We need to learn the exact intention of the Lord so that our whole life will satisfy the will and the purpose of the Lord, don't we?

Those who look up to the Lord Jesus will see the purpose of the Lord. However, if we give higher priority to our own purpose, our life will end in failure—we won't be able to accomplish the wishes of the Lord and thus, we will never be rewarded. The purpose of the Lord cannot be seen by the eyes alone. It is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:17

This light, temporary nature of our suffering is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any comparison.

Are we looking at what continues into eternity? Are we living a life that fulfills the purpose of the Lord God? The devil makes all attempts to keep us away

from accomplishing the purpose of the Lord, to keep us tied down to earthly things and to make us pursue worldly aims. It is our common experience that the devil often leads us to be captivated by matters that are irrelevant to the purpose of the Lord so that we fall into paralyzed states.

Let us pray and ask the Lord for our lives to fulfill His purpose and intention.

If, at this moment, you find yourself being bound by human relations and don't know which way to turn, please think of the purpose of the Lord and look up to the Lord Jesus. If you are suffering from personal relationship problems and it is standing in the way of accomplishing the purpose of the Lord, these relationships should be severed immediately.

We have no idea as to what is going to happen in the future. Then, why don't we contemplate the purpose of the Lord and look straight up to the Lord Jesus where He resides high above in the heavens?

You may be at a complete loss as to where and how to serve and work for the Lord in the future. If so, let us simply look up to the Lord Jesus.

"Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you." This verse is telling us the intention of the Lord, which is "transform your entire life to fulfill my purpose." You may be caught in worries now, which make you deeply distressed. However, to resolve your present concerns, please first contemplate how you can fulfill the intention of the Lord. Please look into the purpose of the Lord instead of your own distress. Please use all your worries, troubles and sufferings as a plow in your hands and then look up to the Lord Jesus. Then, new hope will arise in front of your eyes. Let us pray and ask for the purpose of our entire life to perfectly match the purpose of the Lord.

Do we truly know the purpose of our Lord? Have we truly understood the importance of churches as Jesus' body to the Lord God? Do we know how much, as the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus loves and adores the bride, who is represented by churches?

In fact, we all worry about something. Unresolved problems build up in our life. Our sufferings continue and never seem to cease. Furthermore, the devil whispers into our ear; "Your aim is too high. Why don't you compromise yourself and be satisfied with what you have now?" But, we should at no time be satisfied with what we have, should we? When we get satisfied with ourselves, there will be no blessing. The intention of the Lord is clearly stated in the Bible:

Ephesians 3:10-11

He did this so that now, through the church, the wisdom of God in all its variety might be made

known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm in keeping with the eternal purpose that God carried out through the Messiah Jesus our Lord.

We ought to look up to the Lord Jesus alone. Let us look away from all else and just gaze at the Lord Jesus. When the devil presented and promised all wealth of the world to Jesus, He adamantly rejected it. Instead, He kept walking ahead with His eyes fixed on the purpose of the Lord God, didn't He? The devil offered all authority and glory to the Lord Jesus to keep Him away from Crucifixion. However, the eyes of the Lord Jesus were directed fixedly before him.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Lord Jesus was only concerned about the purpose of His Father God. How about us? Let us too look up to the Lord Jesus high above.

Psalms 16:8-9

I have set the Lord before me continually; because he stands at my right hand, I will stand firm. Therefore, my heart is glad, my whole being rejoices, and my body will dwell securely.