

Look Up!

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers (Psalm 1:1).

Scripture: Psalm 1

Song: “’Tis So Sweet to Walk with Jesus”

Within the woods exists a type of tree so dangerous that foresters have dubbed it “widow maker.” These are dead trees or treetops that can come crashing down in a windstorm and injure or even kill a person. Those trained in wilderness survival are warned to “look up” to avoid setting up camp in the shadow of a widow maker.

That idea can apply to our lives as believers in Christ. The Lord exhorts us to look up—to focus our eyes on Him (Hebrews 12:2)—as we navigate the wilderness of this fallen world. Psalm 1 reveals the “widow makers” of the Christian life: walking, standing, and sitting in the paths of the wicked, those who consistently reject the Word of the Lord.

God’s heart is to protect and prosper His people. By sticking to the “trail guide” of the Scriptures, we will avoid the dangers that threaten our commitment to Him. If we should find we’ve wandered from the safe path, we can “relocate our camp” to experience the full blessing of dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty.

Father, teach us to walk in Your paths of righteousness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 May 23–29. **Eileen M. Gregory**, a Bible institute graduate, is a freelance author. She has taught basic Bible doctrine classes at her local church and to inmates in county jails.

Dead or Alive?

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Scripture: John 15:1-8

Song: “We’ve Found the Secret of Living”

The Bible study teacher entered the room and placed a pot of lush, red rhododendrons on a stool. Suddenly he raised a pair of scissors, snipped off a flower, and held it up before the class. “Is this flower alive?” he asked. “Yes,” several students answered. “No,” said another, at which the teacher smiled. Although the flower still had the appearance of being alive, the moment it was separated from its life source, it began the process of dying.

God likens the believer to a branch, capable of producing much fruit. But just like the rhododendron, we as spiritual branches can produce fruit only by remaining connected to the vine. God is the creator of life, and in Christ we are recipients of eternal life. But if we separate ourselves from abiding in Him, we sever our ability to effectively serve Him.

In the Garden of Eden, humanity was cut off from the “vine” of life with God. But through Jesus, the true vine, we are grafted back in. When we are unfruitful in Christ—whether from our sin or from our circumstances—we need only return to our fellowship with Him, to abiding in Him, for He alone gives us life and causes us to grow.

Father, thank You for giving us life and for the honor of serving You. Help us remain in You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Finding Purpose

If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic (James 3:14-15).

Scripture: James 3:13-18

Song: “Wisdom Song”

It was 1974 when Charles Colson, a former Special Counsel to President Nixon, pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice for his involvement in the Watergate scandal. In the wake of his tragic downfall, Colson entrusted his life to Christ; and while serving a seven-month prison sentence, he felt burdened to minister to inmates. He later founded several powerful ministries that have touched millions of lives worldwide for the gospel.

As a free man, Colson was condemned for his crimes; as a condemned man, he found freedom in Christ. His life is a striking example of the exhortations of James: significance does not lie in worldly wisdom and selfish ambition. While these qualities may give the appearance of prosperity and strength, they lead to ruin. God has better things in mind for us! To know true significance, we must know Jesus Christ.

Status, wealth, and ambition all fade away, but eternal rewards await those who apply godly wisdom to their daily lives. The spiritual rewards of purity, peace, consideration, submission, mercy, sincerity, and love have no bounds. In Christ we can enjoy them now—and right on into eternity.

Father, we ask for Your wisdom that we may fulfill Your good and meaningful purposes for our lives. In Jesus name, amen.

The Measure of Peace

The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever (Isaiah 32:17).

Scripture: Isaiah 32:9-20

Song: “One Day”

One morning while doing some research on the internet, I stumbled across an intriguing website that posted the “Global Peace Index”—a ranking of countries around the world according to their level of peacefulness. Produced annually, the list rates each country based on its crime levels, number of incarcerations, and cost of military conflicts.

Immediately the posting brought the words of Jesus to my mind: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). How different the world’s idea of peace is from the peace of God! Peace is at the heart of the gospel because it is rooted in holiness. Where holiness is lacking, peace is lacking as well. But the Lord brings righteousness and peace to His followers in this life now . . . and in eternity when we will experience them fully.

Whenever we feel lost or unsettled in this world, when the difficulties of life make our hearts anxious, we can take courage. We are not alone. God grants us citizenship in a far greater place than this one—a place free of war and crime and incarcerations, a place characterized by quietness and confidence forever.

Father, thank You for the peace of knowing You. Help us fix our hearts and minds on the hope that is in Christ Jesus, who calms our troubled hearts. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Connection to God

“By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:20).

Scripture: Matthew 7:15-20

Song: “Bear Fruit”

Jeanne was baptized at age 60. Following her conversion, she expressed her longing to serve the Lord, but she felt too old and hindered by numerous medical problems. Nevertheless, God granted her desire when she received an invitation to join a prayer team. For years she lifted up countless requests to the Lord. In time she came to be seen as a mighty prayer warrior—one who offered petitions for friends and strangers alike everywhere she went. So many of her requests were answered that someone once commented that they thought she must have a special connection to God.

The gospel of Christ, in all its glorious power, changes our thoughts, desires, and actions. That’s because Christianity, unlike shallow philosophy and false religion, brings us to truth—to the person of Jesus Christ. And the more we draw near to Him, the more His character will mark our lives in recognizable ways. No matter how late in life we come to Christ, He can redeem the barren places of our past and make us fruitful in His kingdom.

There may be times when we feel unusable or unfruitful in our service to God. No matter our circumstance, we can draw near to Him, trusting that He is conforming us to the likeness of His Son and developing godly fruit in us that will reveal the special connection we have to our heavenly Father.

Father, develop Christ’s character in us, and enable us to bear fruit that will draw others to Your love. In Jesus name, amen.

Drink and Live

The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (Ezekiel 47:1).

Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1-7, 12

Song: “Come to the Water”

The number of pure water sources on earth is decreasing, scientists say. They tell us that only about 0.003 percent of the world’s available water is unpolluted. In their quest for best water sources, researchers published results of a study in December 2015, revealing where the cleanest waters exist. The distinction belongs to Puerto Williams, located at the southernmost tip of Chile. Using instruments that could detect pollutants up to two parts per million, scientists tested water from several freshwater sources in the area. The Puerto Williams waters were deemed the purest on the planet.

Water, a common theme throughout the Bible, often represents the Holy Spirit and the cleansing of sin. Just as pure water is essential for physical life, so the “living water” of God’s Spirit is vital to our spiritual life and growth (John 7:37-39). And while sources of pure water on earth may be diminishing, not so the waters of life that flow from God’s holy presence! As the gospel is proclaimed, the waters of new and eternal life continue to reach ever further, and daily the Holy Spirit brings refreshing to all who are in Christ.

What does your soul thirst for? Drink freely and fully from the waters of God. Let His goodness quench your spiritual thirst.

Father, thank You for filling us with the pure and life-giving waters flowing from Your presence. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Living Free

The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want (Galatians 5:17).

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-26

Song: “Change My Heart, Oh God”

A popular action film released in 1991 told the story of an FBI agent devoted to capturing an elusive gang of bank robbers. In one scene, while pep-talking his cohorts, the gang leader revealed the reason behind his crimes. He said it was never about the money for him, but about all of them going against the system. In an attempt to escape honest labor and do things his own way, he unwittingly ensnared himself and suffered a premature death.

In this world we have legitimate needs, but instead of doing as we please—especially when that would violate God’s ways—we must seek answers, provision, and fulfillment through paths of righteous living. Paul encourages us to keep in step with the Holy Spirit and to forsake the sinful desires of our fallen nature. As we develop godly virtues by God’s Spirit, we discover a freedom that is born from within.

When we feel trapped by life’s circumstances, we can resist the urge to create an unacceptable means of escape. We can look to the Lord for what we need. True freedom is a gift from God to those who, through faith in Jesus Christ, daily seek to walk in step with the Spirit.

Father, grant us true hearts that seek Your ways, forsaking our own schemes for fulfillment. Help us to trust You and live by Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name, amen.