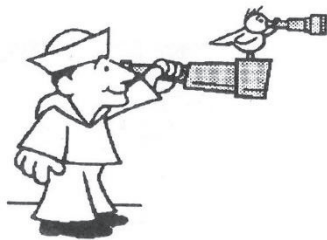




LOOKING FORWARD...

I often write about doctrinal things—and sometimes technical points in the Bible—but this article is more in the *inspirational* or *practical* category.



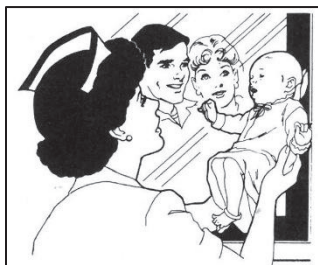
We have all faced situations that were difficult. But the stress of any present difficulty can be greatly reduced if we look *beyond* this difficulty, **looking forward** to something that brings us joy.

A great example of this may be seen in the life of Jesus when he faced the agony of the cross. As he prayed in the garden, he sweat as it were great drops of blood. He felt the trauma, the anguish, the torment, as he faced that crisis hour. *Yet...*

FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).

A present situation may be unpleasant, but if we have something pleasant to look forward to, it stimulates hope. It is not pleasant to undergo a serious surgery, yet if this is the door to life and health, it can be endured by **looking forward** to a good outcome.

A similar situation faces a woman in childbirth. The delivery may be a painful and dreaded experience.



“A woman when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; **but** as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for JOY that a human being has been born into the world” (John 16:21). The *anticipation* of that joy can help her through the difficult time.

One man always experienced anxiety when going to a dentist. It had become a phobia with him. In his mind he reasoned that it was for his own good to take proper care of his teeth. This helped some. But the way he dealt more specifically with his problem was this:

On the morning of his dental appointment, he purposely planned something for *right after his appointment* that he enjoyed doing. If the appointment was from 10 until 11 in the morning, looking forward to what he was going to do *after* 11, helped him project his thoughts to the “joy set before him,” rather than the unpleasantness prior to 11.



Each of us may use the same principle regarding things that bother us—by *looking forward* and beyond those things.

Though a man may be in prison, if he knows he will get out on a certain date, he looks forward to his freedom. **He has hope to cope!** But the prisoner who has no possibility of release does not have this hope.

The word “hope,” as commonly used today, tends to express *uncertainty*: “I **hope** things will work out,” “I **hope** I am saved,” etc. But *in Scripture*, the word “hope” is a *positive*. It is not merely wishful thinking; it is a confident expectation. It is a *faith* principle. “Faith is the substance of things *hoped* for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

Many times over the years, I have driven through the tiny town of Hope, Arizona. Upon leaving town, a sign says: YOU’RE NOW BEYOND HOPE.



In life’s journey, some have left hope behind. *Without hope* there is **sadness**; *with hope*, there is **gladness** (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13).

“Now **hope** does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). **Hope** causes us to *rejoice* (12:12). “Christ in you, the **hope** of glory” (Col. 1:27). It is a “blessed **hope**” (Titus 2:13).

Things may be tough right now, but if we know the Lord, we can experience hope in knowing that *he will see us through*. As an old hymn words it (cf. Isa. 43:2; Col. 1:20; Ps. 30:5):

**Some through the water, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song;
In the night season and all the day long.**

The often-quoted Twenty-third Psalm speaks of walking “*through* the valley of the shadow of death.” God will take us *through*—He does not leave us there!

During a time of serious testing, a man put his finger on a Bible verse that says, “It came to pass...” A bit out of context, but by faith he applied this verse to his own situation: that this testing

time did not come to *stay*, it came to *pass*! Better things were ahead.

The fact that these (present) difficulties will pass, provides the basis of a lovely song written by Stuart Hamblen:

**These things shall pass and some great morning,
We'll look back and smile at heartaches we have known.
So don't forget when shadows gather,
The Lord our God is still the King upon his Throne.**

A country music classic tells the story of a poor cotton picker, living in poverty, barely able to get by. Food is scarce, his kids need shoes, his wagon needs repair, even the collection plate at church is nearly empty. But he looks forward to "pickin' time," when things will be better.

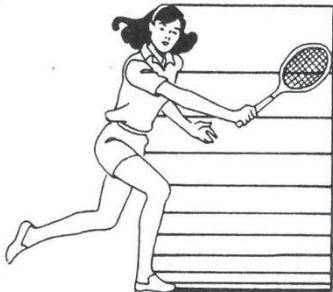
Work may be hard, but *looking forward* to vacation time can ease the burden:

**America today,
A land where children play
A land with brooks to troll and hills to climb
And two weeks we call "vacation time."**

There were even times when Jesus and his disciples would take a break—would "come apart" to a quiet place or mountain top (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:31). It has been said if we do not take time to "come apart," we may **come apart**!

A tremendous example of what **looking forward** can do for a person, is well illustrated in the life of Jacob who agreed to serve seven years for Rachel. "*And they seemed but a few days to him because of the love he had for her*" (Gen. 29:20). For the joy that was set before him, he sailed through the work he faced. His looking forward—his anticipation—kept him from bogging down in discouragement and defeat.

Let me give a similar, but simple, modern-day example. A father told his teen-age son that he had to mow the lawn that afternoon when he got home from school. The young man didn't like mowing the lawn. He made all kinds of excuses in his mind—he was too tired, too busy, etc.



Then his girlfriend came by and asked if he could go play tennis! Knowing he had to mow the lawn, he suddenly got with it! Because of "the joy that was set before him" he now had *incentive*. To be able to do the thing he *wanted* to do, helped him through the job he *didn't want* to do.

How might this principle work for us?

A person could tell himself: I have this unpleasant job to do, but I am going to get in and get it done. Instead of taking all day to do it, it will be done early. Then I will be good to myself: I will take this extra time to do something I *like* to do! This sets up an incentive factor. By this method one can use the pleasant thing for **leverage** to accomplish the unpleasant thing.

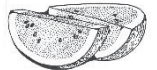
As when the young man mowed the lawn first, the wise policy is to take care of the unpleasant task first, and save the pleasant thing for later—*so there is always something to look forward to*.



When taking a trip, someone might "go now and pay later." But normally it would be better to do the unpleasant part—save up the money first—and then go and enjoy it. This way, while saving up for the trip, one can look forward to it.

When I was in my 20s, twice I hiked from the rim of the Grand Canyon down to the Colorado River and back up. That was quite a hike—and UPHILL all the way back. A trail that is **downhill** coming back is preferred. Better to do the strenuous part first, when fresh; the easier part when tired.

When eating watermelon, some purposely save the heart until last.



A child may be encouraged to eat his supper, knowing that a reward will be a special dessert he likes! But he must eat his supper *first*! He may not like his vegetables, but "for the joy set before him"—the ice cream—he obtains the necessary incentive.

Incentive. It is the story of a man who works hard digging a well, looking forward to striking water—or a prospector who continues to dig, looking forward to finding gold—or a college student who digs ditches now, so he will not have to dig ditches later!

Any of us who have written a book, always look forward to the day it is finally completed, in print and published!

We all function better when we have something to look forward to.

Some may be looking forward to receiving a letter or an item they ordered through the mail. They may be looking forward to a television program they plan to watch that night. They may be looking forward to reading a new book or magazine. They may be looking forward to special meetings planned for their church. They may be looking forward to a visit with a friend or a phone call from a special person.



Some couples keep romance in their marriage because they are always looking ahead, planning special times together. Such times need not be elaborate or expensive to be special. It might be a picnic in a park or by a lake. It might be a dinner at home with their favorite food. The wife may set the table especially nice and light a couple candles. Throughout the day, both look forward to this little celebration they have planned.

But what are they celebrating? It need not be some monumental thing—they may just celebrate because they read this suggestion! Why not?



We live in a complex and busy society. Some find relief from this by engaging in simple things such as planting seeds and looking forward to seeing a garden spring to life.



A **rut** has been defined as “a grave with both ends knocked out of it.” This is where a lot of people are. Suppose a trip is planned to visit friends or relatives. Instead of taking the same route that may have been traveled many times, why not break up the routine, and go a different way?

Some years ago a man wrote a series of books on the **backroads** of California. His books were not about Disneyland, Yosemite National Park, or San Francisco, all of which are already well-known. Instead, he zeroed in on many little-known places which were interesting because of their uniqueness or historical significance. With a little research or inquiry, such places can be visited and are often not that far out of the way!



A visit to some interesting place along the way can turn what might otherwise be a dull trip—especially for children—into something to look forward to. It might include a picnic by a stream, a hike to a waterfall, a few minutes to throw a frisbee or ball—perhaps to fly a kite from some breezy knoll!

What is true in natural things, is also true in *spiritual* things for the family of God. We should not get into a religious rut. We need to allow God to do a “new thing” in us (cf. Isa. 43:19) as His Spirit changes us “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). We need to let go of hurts, losses, disappointments, and trials of the past. Instead of looking back, we should **look forward** with anticipation! The windshield on a car is always larger than the rearview mirror.

Paul phrased it this way: “Forgetting those things which are **behind** and reaching **forward** to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the UPWARD call of God” (Phil. 3:13, 14).

Looking forward provides a moving on UP dimension.

Years ago in Tacoma, Washington, I had breakfast with C. M. Ward (1909-1996), well-known speaker for many years (1953-1978) on the nation-wide radio program “Revivaltime.”

Some years later, during a television interview, I heard him say—perhaps only half seriously—if he were to put a hymnbook together, it would include the theme song from “The Jeffersons”: MOVING ON UP! At the time, the popular television comedy series focused on a black couple, George and Louise Jefferson, who prospered and were able to move up to a deluxe apartment in a swanky high-rise building in Manhattan.

As Christ followers, we should be moving on up, *spiritually* speaking, acquiring more of His truth, more of His love, more of His kindness, more of HIM!

The words of an old hymn (1892) HIGHER GROUND come to mind.

**I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day
Still praying as I'm onward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.**

**My heart has no desire to stay,
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer my aim is *higher* ground.**

**Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith on heaven's tableland
A *higher* plane than I have found,
Lord plant my feet on *higher* ground!**

Colossians 3:2: “Set your mind on things ABOVE, not on things on the earth.”

A church that has a vision—is winning souls, is growing, is building, is looking forward—is a vibrant and victorious assembly. But a church that no longer has a vision, that is not moving along in the flow of the Holy Spirit, will dry up. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18)



A small child may look forward to the start of school. A young person may look forward to being able to drive a car. There is a looking forward to graduation, marriage, children, a career—for *young* people.



But when people get older and feel their life is behind them, it becomes more difficult to look forward. They may become discouraged and despondent. What is the answer?

The answer is to **deliberately** set up things in one's life, so there is always something to look forward to. Plan a trip, pursue a hobby, get involved in volunteer work, make the effort to be a FRIEND.

**Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by—
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good and as bad as I.**

**I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban;
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a *friend* to man.** —Sam Walter Foss

**If I can help somebody as I pass along,
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,
If I can show somebody he is traveling wrong,
Then my living shall not be in vain.**

**If I can do my duty as a Christian ought,
If I can bring back beauty to a world up-wrought,
If I can spread love's message that the Master taught,
Then my living shall not be in vain.** —Alma B. Androzso



An elderly Christian gentleman once told me he might have ended up sitting around doing nothing. But because his dog wanted to go for walks, he daily was out and about, a practice that contributed to his physical and mental wellbeing.

I fondly remember Jack, a man I knew years ago who lived in Fresno, California. He was a fine Christian man who often sent offerings to my ministry. He sold a piece of property across from his house to McDonald's for a fast-food restaurant. He was up in years and was not hurting for money (especially after this sale!). But when McDonald's was about to open, he went over and applied for a job!

Soon he was making hamburgers, frying fries, and waiting on customers. He was by far the oldest employee, but he enjoyed working alongside the young people and they enjoyed him also. Time was not dragging for him now. Each day he looked forward to the challenges of the fast-food business.



Old age, even with its difficulties, should not be a time of depression—*certainly not for a Christian*. For while in one sense, much of one's life is behind, in another sense—an overwhelmingly *greater* sense—one's life is ahead:

ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST!

"For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised...this mortal shall put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:52-58).

"Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:4).

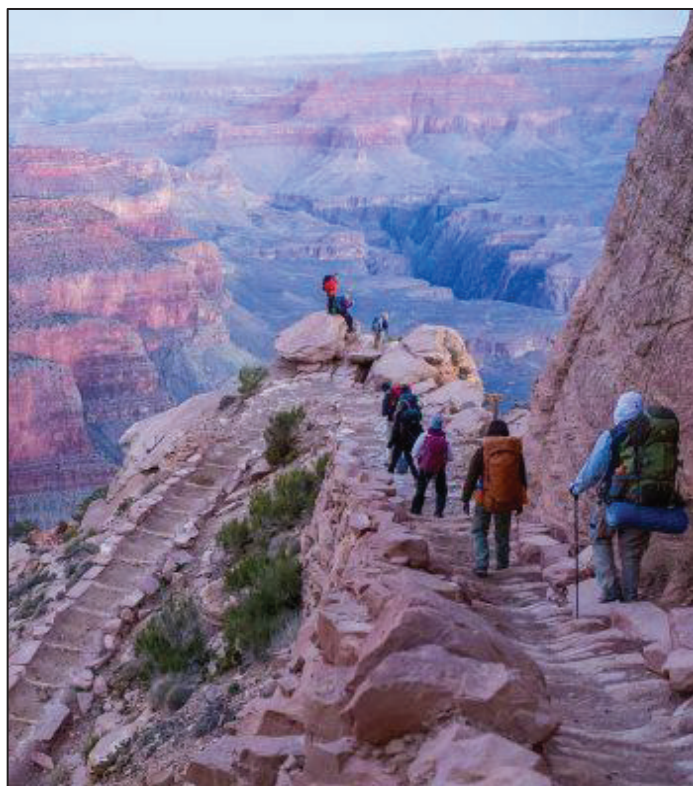
The hymn "When We See Christ" (written in 1941 by Esther Kerr Rusthoi) begins with these words:

**Ofttimes the days seem *long*, our trials *hard* to bear,
We're tempted to *complain*, to *murmur* and *despair*...**

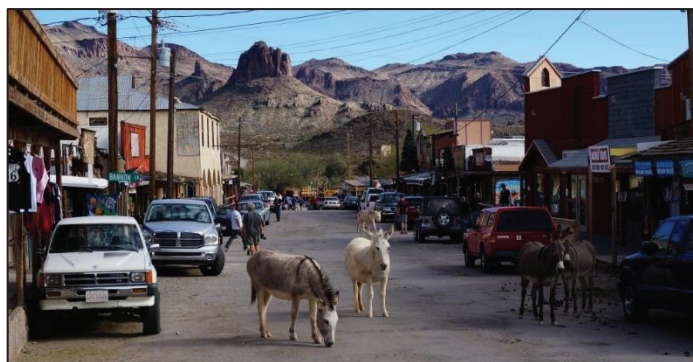
But then, *looking forward*:

**It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so *small* when we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race till we see Christ.**

**GOD HAS PREPARED WONDERFUL THINGS
FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM (1 Cor. 2:9; James
2:5). WE LOOK FORWARD—WE HAVE NOT LEFT
HOPE BEHIND!**



In the foregoing article, I mentioned hiking from the rim of the Grand Canyon all the way down to the river—about 13 miles round trip. It is an *awesome* hike, but with one disadvantage: it is **UPHILL** all the way back!



Also in the article, I mentioned that a trip which might otherwise be boring, can become interesting: by taking a different route with points of interest not seen before. A couple years ago I did this by driving a bendy portion of old "Route 66" (between Needles and Kingman) over the mountain through Oatman. It is like a ghost town (but with people living there). Wild (tame) burros roam the streets.



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