

Don't Look Back!

Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt
(Genesis 19:26).

Scripture: Genesis 19:1, 15-26, 29

Song: "Give Me Jesus"

Years ago, my nephew James got into drugs and the wrong crowd that offered him companionship, acceptance, and escape through pot. It didn't take long for my Christian nephew to discover the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:33: "Bad company corrupts good character."

But in His mercy, God opened a way of escape through rehab and classes about addiction. Grabbing hold of his second chance, James returned to God, ran from his circle of friends, and never looked back.

Too bad Lot's wife didn't do the same. When sin reached the boiling point and God decided to destroy Sodom, He made a way of escape for Lot and his family. They even received an angelic escort from the impending doom. But the attraction of sin proved too strong. Though they were told to flee and not look back (Genesis 19:17), Lot's wife took one more look—to her ruin.

We may be in our own "Sodom" and not know it: an illicit relationship, a dishonest business deal, a crippling habit. But God can forgive and change us right where we are. And He might require our complete separation. So when He tells us to flee, we must—without a backward look.

Lord, show me my Sodom. Once You make a way out, help me leave all of sin behind, never to return. In Christ, amen.

September 1. **Sherri Langton** is a magazine editor and workshop speaker at Christian writers conferences. She enjoys playing percussion at her church, as well as walking and swimming. Sherri lives in Denver, Colorado.

Set Apart for God

Speak unto the children of Israel, . . . When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD (Numbers 6:2, *KJV*).

Scripture: Numbers 6:1-5, 13-15

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

In a remote village in India, Ron’s house burned down. His village had, at some point, rejected him for his faith. “I will never renounce the Christ!” Ron proclaimed. He continued to show the love of Jesus to his enemies. Because of Ron’s steadfast testimony, eventually the whole village converted to Christ—and rebuilt Ron’s house! His consecrated life convinced them of the gospel.

The Nazarite vow outlined how an Israelite could consecrate his life to God. Avoiding wine, growing long hair, not attending funerals—all of these were highly public actions. A Nazarite was always in the spotlight, showcasing his devotion to God.

Jesus’ work on the cross sanctifies us through faith. We no longer observe strict rules as an exhibition of faith. Because of grace, we consecrate ourselves to Christ by how we live. We answer anger with gentleness. We feed the hungry. We refrain from gossip. We uplift others in prayer. Each act is a holy response to the forgiveness and freedom we have been granted. Divine love flows from God to us. Love sets us apart for good works.

Father, thank You for Your freedom that sets us apart to do Your will. Help us to do good works all the days of our lives. In Your name, amen.

September 2–8. **Kathleen Dunlap** lives in Colorado with her husband, son, and slobbering dog. She enjoys cooking, crocheting, and going on Sunday afternoon drives with her family.

Unlikely Characters

Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name . . . (Psalm 99:6, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 99

Song: “Throw Out the Life-Line”

George saw the man on the street corner, begging. He sensed God asking him to offer the man, not just food, but lodging and clothes. George obeyed and invited the man to his house. It was the beginning of George’s ministry. To this day, George has housed over 100 homeless men, helping them find God, reunite with their families, and gain jobs. George has let God use him.

The psalmist extols the holiness and power of God. He is in awe of God’s greatness. Then he recounts names of outstanding men of God. Moses was a shepherd. Aaron was shy. Samuel was too young. Each one seemed inadequate for the role of priest, yet all were used by God for His glory.

We all begin the journey of faith with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and talents. We may believe, because of our flaws and brokenness, that God won’t use us. But God is simply looking for willing vessels for His Spirit. He desires soft hearts and pliable wills. Are you reluctant to volunteer at church because you think you are under-qualified? Are you procrastinating at giving because you think the amount is too small? Are you hesitant to speak about your faith because of your past sins? God works best when we are at our weakest. Rely on Him. He desires you. Be humble, remain willing, stay ready.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You use unlikely people to do Your will. We will keep our eyes on You, not on our weaknesses. In Your name, amen.

Grace in the Waiting

Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year (1 Samuel 1:6, 7).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:1-8

Song: "Be Still, My Soul"

Jenny watched her friends marry. She attended their baby showers. Yet, she continued to age without her dream for a husband and children fulfilled. "God, I'm here still," she prayed. "I'm waiting for You." She never wavered in faith. After 25 years of patient waiting, God granted Jenny a husband and a son.

Hannah desperately wanted a child. Peninnah tormented Hannah because she was barren. Year after year, the fact that God hadn't responded to Hannah's request weighed on her. It seemed as if He wasn't listening to her, or as if she had committed a grievous sin that caused her to fall into disfavor. In truth, He was asking her to wait. His long-term plan was grander than she expected.

As our prayers remain unanswered, we must remember that we only see a portion of the time-line. While we long for a dream to be fulfilled, whether it is a relationship, a job, or even a child, patient waiting strengthens our faith. Be still before the Lord. Hold fast. Cling to your faith as a burr sticks to linen. Keep talking to Jesus. Make known your needs to Him. Busy your hands for His purpose. God will always accomplish His plans for you. Never doubt Him.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You have great plans for us. As we walk in faith, help us to wait patiently and sweetly. Keep our hearts securely in Your truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Counting the Cost

I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever (1 Samuel 1:22, *KJV*).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:21-23

Song: “Is Your All on the Altar?”

The business world scoffed at Jim. “He will never make a single dime,” they said. Jim ignored them as he built his company. Every time he was profitable, he increased his giving to his local church. At the height of his career, Jim lived off 10 percent of his income and gave 90 percent back to the Lord. Jim’s response to grace was total commitment of his life, work, and finances to God.

Hannah received from the Lord the son she had prayed for. Samuel was her pride and joy; she deeply loved him. Still, her dedication to the Lord was her driving force. She gave her son back to the Lord for His purpose. It was her greatest sacrifice.

Christ sacrificed His all on the cross for us to gain eternal life, and we must respond. What is He asking us to do for Him? Will we joyfully surrender to His will? Our calling might not be the same as that of our neighbor. From us He might require time. From others He may ask for financial resources. His grace tugs us into the way of sacrifice. In the giving, we find joy. In the release, we find freedom. Listen to His gentle voice. Answer with faith in action. The cross demands our best. Let us give back unreservedly.

Lord, thank You for redeeming us, so that we can wholeheartedly give ourselves to You. We praise You for Your ultimate sacrifice. In Your name, amen.

Delayed Joy

For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him (1 Samuel 1:27, *KJV*).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:24-28

Song: “Showers of Blessing”

When the prison door clanged behind Amy, hopelessness enveloped her. She rubbed her stomach where the growing baby kicked. The next day, after a long labor, prison officials took Amy's baby. A drug addict was not fit for motherhood. While in prison, Amy heard the message of the gospel and received Christ. After her sentence, Amy began work in a nonprofit organization, helping single moms who are recovering drug addicts. Now God is refreshing her life with blessing after her pain.

What a change has come over Hannah! Once her back was bent in sorrow and loss. Once, her words held bitterness. Now, she stands boldly before the Lord's priest, declaring all that her God has done for her. She is renewed, restored, and ready for worship.

We are not promised ease. The guarantee of God does not say that we will not suffer; the promise is for joy in the end. During harsh nights when our very souls are seized, we can have unshakable faith because we know in whom we are believing. Loss, grief, pain—these plague our human condition. Yet we know that God hears our prayers. His love evokes change in all circumstances. He stays faithful, ultimately completing His work in us. If sorrow or suffering overwhelms you, cling to His promises. Joy will come. Blessings will abound. All in His time.

Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us into Your glorious light. Your love ignites hope. We praise You for Your goodness. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Lord's Presence

The boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD (1 Samuel 2:21).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:18-21

Song: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

Lawrence whistled while he peeled the potatoes for dinner. With a small smile, he placed them in the pot for boiling. "Lord, bless every soul that will participate in this meal," he prayed. Lawrence loved to pray while in the kitchen and garden of his home. News of his continual communion spread, and people traveled from far and wide to learn about his relationship with God. "We should establish ourselves in a sense of God's presence by continually conversing with Him," he said. Lawrence knew that no matter where he was, he could always talk to God.

Samuel spent his boyhood in the tabernacle, where God's presence resided in the Israelite world. Today God's presence dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. He is not limited to a certain location, but He is everywhere. As we seek His face through His Word and prayer, we experience more of His presence.

Are we inviting Him into each moment? Are we attuned to His Spirit? We must listen, observe, seek silence. It takes constant practice. When we are driving to work, cooking a meal, or walking in nature, we can bear our souls to Him. Our hearts can commune with His Spirit through praise and worship. The fruit of His presence will then manifest in our lives. Prayers answered. Peace overflowing. Love displayed. Time with the Lord is time well spent.

Heavenly Father, help us to find stillness in Your presence, even in the busy moments. Thank You that You are always near to us. In Jesus' name, amen.