

What would happen if we spent all of our time looking up. Not down at our feet or out at the world, but always looking up at the sky? As the advertising disclaimer points out, your results might vary. However, there are a few things I would expect to happen if I continuously looked up. First, my neck would get stiff and sore: looking up quickly becomes uncomfortable. Going to a movie, I find that there are only a few seats that I can enjoyably sit in. There is a fine balance between so far back that I can not see the screen and so far forward and my neck aches long afterwards.

Second, if I spend my time looking up, I am not only useless but potentially dangerous as well. True, I can read looking up, but it is awkward. Writing is next to impossible. When driving a car or riding a bike I need to be looking at the road, for all of our sakes.

Third, if I spend my time looking up, it pretty well guarantees that I will be looking down my nose whenever I look at the world and at people. Not only does this bias my view of the world, it tends to bias people's attitude toward me if all they can see is the tip of my nose.

I am sure that you could add additional problems which you might encounter if you spent all of your time looking up at the sky. While you might be able to think of problems, more likely you are no doubt wondering why we're even discussing this.

Imagine that we were among those who saw the resurrected Lord, had just been told that we would be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem (where he had just been crucified),

and Samaria (home of those who had grossly distorted our common faith heritage) and in all of the world (that place full of pagans). Something said about a Holy Spirit that will come upon us and aid us in doing all this has our heads spinning. And then Jesus is taken up into the sky. I would probably have been staring up at the sky as well.

Disbelief, shock, anxiety, and umpteen other emotions would weld me to that spot, fixating my eyes where I had last seen Jesus. Part of me would be hoping, desperately hoping, for a massive 'do over': could we do these last three years over so that, knowing now what I am supposed to do next, I can figure out why I am feeling so unprepared to do it?

And then two angels have the nerve to ask me why I am looking up. What did they expect me to be doing? Celebrating? Then again, perhaps those angels know about the problems with spending all of our time looking up.

First and foremost, soon our spiritual necks will get sore. The Bible often refers to stiff-necked people: those too proud to need God and those too stubborn to accept God. Traditionally, we look up when we turn to God: it is as if by looking a little harder at the sky, we will see Jesus. However, if we want to see Jesus, we need to look out at the world. In the actions of Mother Teresa, the peacemaking of the Mennonites, the faith based courage of Dr King, that is where we see Jesus. In the Parish Nurses, the musicians, the Weibels faithfully opening up the church each week for our worship, that is where we see Jesus. Looking up just makes our necks sore and we miss seeing the

Lord at work around us.

Second, we become useless, if not dangerous. It is hard to do what we are called to do as followers of Jesus if we are always looking up. It is hard to make sandwiches for the Salvation Army, next to impossible to serve them, if we are only looking up. The ushers and deacons, the Sunday School teachers, all become close to useless if they are not watching what they are doing. We can not see new opportunities to serve, new ways to share our love and our faith with others, if we are only looking up. Perhaps the most dangerous thing we can do is act as if there is a difference in our lives when we are looking up at God and when we are looking out at the world. When we fail to bring our faith into our daily lives, dangerous hypocrisy soon follows.

Third, by always looking up toward God, we start looking down our noses at the world. The Pharisees, along with the gnostics and many others, looked upon the world as unclean if not evil. Complex rules were needed to keep us from being soiled by the world. We quickly decide that this is such an imperfect world that there is little hope for it. We no longer have a sense of responsibility for taking care of it, of making it a better place.

Soon, all we can do is look up at where Jesus departed and wait, spending our life frozen in time, waiting for Jesus to return.

A final reason for not spending our time looking up is that we need to add depth to our faith, depth that comes from living it out in the real world. The story of the early

church is incredibly full of stories of people who had relied upon Jesus, let Jesus do all the talking and thinking and acting. And then, suddenly doing it themselves. With the leading of the Holy Spirit, they continuously amazed the world, and themselves, with what they could do. Jesus had left them in charge and with a mission; as promised, the helper did in fact come to assist them. So started a wonderful cycle of faith in action leading to more faith which again was put into action; a cycle that continues even today.

So, as the angels challenged those staring at the sky, staring at where they had last seen Jesus, so are we challenged as well. This is not the time to stand, inactive, unable or unwilling to move. This is not the time to stare into heaven as if that will hasten the return of Christ. This is the time to look out into the world, see God at work, see opportunities for us to be at work in God's name, and to strengthen our faith as we put it into action. Let us respond to the words of Christ and be witnesses in Salt Lake, in Utah, and to the remotest ends of the earth.