

Excerpt from . . .

A Forester's

## Field Guide to Devotion

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Location, Location . . .

**“Thus you will walk in the ways of good men  
and keep to the paths of the righteous.  
For the upright will live in the land,  
and the blameless will remain in it.”  
-- Proverbs 2:20, 21**

I can still remember the look of surprise on his face. He had been telling me about his property and describing the general types and sizes of trees that he had. He went through the list in a particular order: brushy areas that used to be corn fields, a pure Virginia pine stand, an area of stunted oak on a ridgetop, and a small-sawtimber yellow poplar stand. He concluded by leaning forward conspiratorially and said, “Now, I have one area that has some truly nice walnut, hard maple, cherry and red oak. Some of them are four feet in diameter – probably veneer.” He sat back with a satisfied smile waiting for me to ask.

I pointed to the topographic map that was in front of us on the table and said, “Are they right about here?”

His jaw dropped in disbelief. He knew that I had not been on the property before. “How did you know that?” he questioned, his brow furrowed.

“Magic,” I replied matter of factly. “The trees talk to me.”

It wasn't magic, of course, it was an educated guess supported by experience. In the Appalachian mountain region of western Pennsylvania, trees grow better on certain areas of the land according to which direction of the compass the land faces. This is known as the aspect of the growing site. Trees that grow with a southwestern exposure experience the poorest results. Trees with a southeastern or northwestern exposure can do reasonably well. But trees nestled in a hollow that faces to the northeast have the opportunity to become the best of the best. So I had simply glanced over the map, located the only northeastern hollow on his property, and took my best shot.

Trees do not choose where they are planted; however, to a greater or lesser extent, people do. Even those of us who do not choose where we live geographically have choices to make. We can often select where and how to spend our time and the people we spend our time with. Even if we do not have that freedom, we can choose what we think about. The orientation of our relationships, thoughts and affections will prove to yield decidedly

**differing outcomes to the degree that we face toward or away from Christ.**

**Those who choose to set the direction of their lives away from God will ultimately reap a harvest of despair. The early chapters of Proverbs are replete with descriptions and warnings of those who do not follow God's ways. Wicked men are described as those "whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways" (Proverbs 2:12-15). At the end of their lives they will not "attain the paths of life;" they will be "cut off from the land." But this does not have to be the outcome.**

**Paul encourages us in the latter part of his letter to the Philippians to orient our minds and lives toward all that is positive. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."**

**That this admonition is much more than "positive thinking" is obvious from start to finish. He begins with truth, moves through life application, and ends with the comfort of a vital relationship with God. That this goal is attainable is demonstrated by Paul's life.**

**As a forester, I can tell where the trees of greatest potential will be by noticing where they grow. As a youth leader, I can discern the quality and direction of a young person's character by noticing the manner and subject of their conversation, how they spend their time, and who they hang out with. It's not done with magic; it comes with an experiential knowledge of aspect.**

**Living your life in a way that pleases God and reaps eternal benefits begins with the proper aspect. Make the choice today and everyday to orient your thoughts, affections, words and actions in a manner that will move you along the paths of righteousness. "And the God of peace will be with you."**