



Spiritual Motivation

Pushing through when you're out of gas

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The Christian life is not a fun run, it is a marathon

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Preface

This world and its god (Satan) have a totally different agenda for believer and non-believer alike. Heeding their call is the antithesis of God's command. God commands us to be separate from the world and its allure. Satan constantly defines real "purpose" in life as the fulfillment of personal goals and selfish ambitions. This is done in a perpetual barrage of enticing propaganda, encouraging all human beings to participate in the process of self-edification and power.

Power and possessions are the goal of goals, and too much is never quite enough. More, bigger, better, newer ... the drive for fulfillment never ceases. Sadly, most of us to one extent or another have been seduced by this lie. Some of us without even realizing the price being paid for these quests.

This study will examine the various ways that believers can start their journeys back to the Lord. There is a longing for importance and meaning built into every man by God. While Satan has offered many attractive counterfeits, eventually all of us want to find the way back home.

Introduction

The purpose of a believer's life should be different from the world. It should be distinct, defined, determined, and evident. We are a new creation in Christ and as such require a new game plan for spiritual fulfillment.

Paul defines the believer's purpose clearly...

Philippians 3:7-14

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

God has determined that all believers are to be conformed to the image of Christ. The believer's life is an evolutionary process in which we are born again as a different creature; a spiritual creature, and we systematically mutate in purpose and practice until we are completely conformed to our new identity. We are to imitate *and gravitate* toward the very life of Christ. The process is slow. It will take a lifetime. There are no quick fixes, and very few immediate transformations.

For most of us, this process requires significant discipline, and resolve so deep that it propels us through the most discouraging and difficult times. This transformation can only happen through the power of the Holy Spirit and personal dedication. The Christian life was never designed to be a walk in the park. Scriptural evidence clearly shows that every believer with a winning track record had to endure monumental setbacks and discouragement en route to their maturity. We should expect nothing else. The myth of the perfect Christian life can get dispelled quite abruptly and we must see this earthly trek for what it is... a true marathon.

What then is the motivation to see the purpose through? How do we keep the fire stoked and the momentum up? This is the quest of this study, to define many spiritual motivations from which to draw the determination and resolve to become totally conformed to the image of Christ. The book of Hebrews presents a significant variety of motivating paradigms from which to learn. The first and most important habit to adopt and lesson to learn is that *faith* is a confident action not passive posture. Faith is confidence on display.

We'll begin this program by examining a significant portion of the book of Hebrews; known as *the faith chapter*. Instead of leading off this study with examples and testimonies of believers who have overcome discouragement or learned how to toughen up their thought life, we'll instead listen to The motivation authority; the Word of God. Read this entire passage slowly and thoroughly and let the Holy Spirit reveal His power. When you find yourself "under the circumstances," the only escape is through the tunnel of faith.

Hebrews 11:1-40

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the

edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

1. Relational Spirituality

Our Greatness and Our Smallness

Man is a peculiar creature, and in many ways a contradiction. We were created in the image of God, yet we are entangled in sin. We are the most creative, and the most destructive beings on the planet, and yet the God of the universe still cares for us. How can this be?

Psalm 8:3-4

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

Isaiah 40:26

Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

The universe, at last count, contains more than two hundred billion stars (200,000,000,000), and He not only created them and knows their real names, He maintains them individually.

Psalm 8:5-8

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Man was created to rule over the works of God's hand, but forfeited this dominion in the devastation of the fall. Though things are currently controlled by the God of this world, all things will again be brought back under God's control when He sets up His own Son as the King.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Scripture makes it quite clear that as children in God's family, we are slated to join Christ's administration, during His reign on earth if we are counted faithful servants in this lifetime.

2 Timothy 2:10-12

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.

God's Ceaseless Love

God chose to love us.

His love was never earned, and never will be. Having responded to His love, by placing our faith in Christ's payment for our sins, nothing can separate us from that love, or diminish it.

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This means that we are totally secure in God's love. Nothing we do can cause God to love us less. Beyond the scope of human understanding, God has chosen to love us unconditionally. While sin in

our lives can interrupt the flow of His blessing, nothing can separate us from His love.

How do we respond to such a love? All too often, these revealed truths seem so remote that they don't impact our everyday lives. We sing about, and hear about the love of God in church and Bible studies, but miss the radical implication for our personal lives. How can we understand this principle of spiritual maturity?

Loving God involves two main ingredients, time and obedience. Any relationship takes time, and without the dedication and discipline of solitude, silence, prayer, and scripture reading, we will never become intimate with Christ. Obedience is the proper response to the charges from scripture to 1) Love God, 2) Serve others, and 3) Deny strongholds to sin.

When we discover that the personal author of time, space, matter, and energy has, for some incomprehensible reason, chosen to love us to the point of infinite sacrifice, we begin to grasp the unconditional security we longed for all our lives. As we expand our vision of our acceptance and security in Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us, we begin to realize that God is not the enemy of our joy, but in fact the source of our joy.

As we grow to know and love God, we learn that we can trust His character, promises, and precepts. When He asks us to avoid something, it is not because He is a cosmic killjoy, but He knows us and knows what will keep us growing toward the person He designed us to be. The risk of obedience is that it will often make no sense to us at the time. It is completely inhuman to obey the things that the Holy Spirit reveals in Scripture. Radical obedience sometimes flies in the face of human logic, but it is these times that God tests and reveals the quality of our trust and dependence on Him.

Loving God in response to His first loving us is an act of the Holy Spirit carried out through the humbled obedience of a grateful servant.

2. Paradigm Spirituality

Life is a journey, but where are we going?

A paradigm is a way of seeing based on explicit or implicit rules that shape one's perspective. A paradigm shift takes place when the rules or boundaries change, so that we no longer see things from the same perspective. When the rules change, our way of seeing is altered.

It is the common practice for we mortals to live our lives as if it has no end, as if indeed this life were eternal. We scarcely consider that we are all but one single heartbeat from the end of our lives. Only in times of emotional tragedy, like the death of someone close, or perhaps a brush with a life-threatening situation, do we truly see just how temporary this life is.

Moses, near the end of his life, had one of those rare reality-check moments when he cried out to the Lord concerning the brevity and uncertainty of life. He wrote:

Psalm 90- (excerpts)

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning--though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

The length of our days is seventy years--or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us-- yes, establish the work of our hands.

David was equally aware of the uncertainty of life.

Psalm 39:4-7

"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Selah

Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

"But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.

Isaiah uses a different metaphor to describe the difference between temporal and the eternal.

Isaiah 40:6-8

"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

Biblical Realism and Hope

While Scripture reveals over and over again that life on this earth is quite brief, and quite without certain duration, this should not be viewed as a depressing reminder of the futility of life. Rather, it should be the assurance that real meaning - indeed real life - is only alluded to in this lifetime. Real life is eternal. This life is somewhat like an opening act, a pre-game warm-up, or the preface to a book.

Three Views

There are three major philosophies from which all humans choose.

The first expounds that human fulfillment comes ultimately from the pursuit of, and possession of, material things. This view basically states that everything in the universe is the impersonal product of time and chance. This, and variations on this theme, describe philosophies called humanism and atheism.

The second alludes to a higher spirituality that resides in nature, and therefore deep inside the heart of every living thing. This spirituality is not personal, but more cosmic in nature. This class has names like pantheism, transcendentalism, and New Age.

The third world view draws a distinction between creature and Creator and recognizes a responsibility of the created to please the Creator. The Christian belief is called Theism, and believes that the God of the universe has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Christianity alone promises a purpose in this life and a destiny in the next, since the first philosophy offers only annihilation, and the second some sort of soul recycling or cosmic absorption.

For the believer, there is meaning in this life, and a hunger implanted into the soul of every regenerated man to please his heavenly Father. The prospect of participating as a meaningful child of a personal God, the promise of eternal life in the presence of that God, and intimacy with fellow believers makes Christianity the only living hope in life.

Two Competing Paradigms

Believers, just like unbelievers, are “free moral agents,” and thus have the ability to choose which paradigm by which they want to live. Someone once said “the real act of discovery consists not of finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.” This is the issue with the child of God. Along with the new birth came a new set of eyes, with the expectation of God that His children would truly see this life for what it is... basic training for our eternal lifetime.

Of course, the draw of this world, and its appeal to the base physical senses and emotional desires, lures many believers away from this reality. The worldly paradigm promises “immediate” fulfillment, intense pleasure, and the praise of fellow man. It is easy to be lured by the

temporal paradigm because we live in a temporal world. All believers have experienced the emptiness behind the lure at one time or another.

The men and women of Hebrews 11 embraced the eternal paradigm...

Hebrews 11:13-16

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

It takes great courage and dedication to live in the eternal paradigm because of the bombardment of seductive propaganda coming from the ruler of this world. Blinding a child of God from seeing and obeying the truth is a significant victory in the ongoing spiritual war between the god of this world and the God of creation. The child of God must realize that he is on a brief spiritual pilgrimage through the wasteland of this life, and that he is en route to another land.

Focus is critical and spiritual blinders are recommended.

2 Peter 3:9-11

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

If we examine the heart's deepest longings, it becomes evident that the fulfillment of these aspirations may well be touched, but cannot ever

be satisfied by any of the offerings of this transitory world. There is insufficient time, opportunity, or energy to even scratch the surface of our deep-seated hopes and dreams.

The days of the years of our lives are few, and swifter than a weavers shuttle. Life is a short and fevered rehearsal for a concert we cannot stay to give. Just when we appear to have attained some proficiency, we are forced to lay our instruments down. There is simply not enough time to think, to become, to perform what the constitution of our natures indicates we are capable of.

W. Tozer

The Knowledge of the Holy

When the concerns of this life squeeze us into caring more for success in this life, we actually put our souls in a spiritual starvation mode. Our focus on short-lived issues that will soon pass away causes us to lose sight of the very issues that will largely determine our eternal future. Like a baby attracted to shiny objects, we are easily seduced into grasping at this life's illusions, even as adults, we are well too apt to, as a popular song describes... "make a deal with the devil for an empty IOU."

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.

The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

James 4:4

...friendship with the world is hatred toward God. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Luke 16:15

And he said unto them, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

These verses are making one fact perfectly clear. We are to reckon this life for what it is, no more, and no less. It is only this lifetime that affords the believer the opportunity to prepare his heart for the next. Recognizing that at best, we have “three-score and ten” years to live this life, and that we usually waste the first “score” in foolishness, we simply cannot afford to waste any more. Paul puts it very succinctly...

1Corinthians 6:19-20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

The lesson of Paradigm Spirituality is clear. Seeing life clearly, we have not another moment to squander. Perhaps Robin Williams said it well in the movie Dead Poets Society-- “carpe diem”-- seize the moment.

3. Disciplined Spirituality

It is easy to slip into one of two extremes regarding the Christian life. The first extreme overemphasizes our role and minimizes God's role. It emphasizes rules, rededication efforts, and human activity, and virtually ignores the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The second extreme overemphasizes God's role and minimizes our role. This position is characterized by a "let go and let God" form of passivity. It stresses the work of the Holy Spirit and excludes human discipline.

Balance

The biblical balance is that the spiritual life is both human and divine. On the human side, we are to "work out our salvation..." but on the divine side, it is God who gives us both the desire and the power to accomplish His purposes.

Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Spiritual motivation starts with the realization that God will neither force us to live a spirit-centered life, nor will He acknowledge religious activity, word or deed, that is not the product of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The former would make a farce of man's accountability to God, and the latter would presume that God delivers spiritual rewards for a religious rituals. Spiritual life is Christ's life fleshed-out through our lives.

John 15:4-11

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask what-ever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Romans 12:1-3

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Dependence

While it is true (and we have heard it said many times) that “we can only live the Christian life by the power of the Holy Spirit,” what does that really mean? Is this just another of many phrases we have

learned from years of Christian teaching that sounds good, but we don't know a real-world way to apply to our everyday lives?

It is crucial that we develop a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit's presence and power. This initial act takes a special discipline in our thought life. The first step is the most critical. Every moment of every day must be viewed as being in the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are in His presence perpetually. He doesn't nap, or take a lunch break, He is there when we remember to call on Him, and He is also there when we hope He isn't looking. He sees what you see, and He hears everything you say and hear, He feels your greatest happiness, and feels your deepest pain.

The second critical step is to realize that absolutely nothing happens to us without a purpose. Accidents may occur in our physical lives, but we must realize that those same "accidents" were approved by God as learning experiences in the School of Christian Maturity. When we push to the front of our conscious thinking, the fact that the Spirit is with us always, it is easier to believe that there is a Godly purpose in the smallest of experiences.

The Holy Spirit is not a passive observer in our lives. He is not some cosmic hall monitor assigned to put a damper on our lives. He is our personal trainer, and He has a mission. That mission is to sanctify us, mold us to the image of Jesus Christ. Although we tend to sense the Lord's presence and purpose only when monumental things happen in our lives, His agenda is to influence every moment of our lives, big and small, with a heavy emphasis on the small.

Discipline

The third part of our making this life work right comes quite naturally, after the first two are in place. After we realize that He is as present in our life as breath itself, and that He intends for every moment to be an opportunity to grow closer to acting like Jesus Christ, the last step is to ask directions. It takes great discipline to follow another's lead

Perhaps one reason it is difficult to live "the Christian life" is that we don't want to be told what to do. We'd rather draw-up our own plans and do it our own way, instead of asking our live-in personal coach what to do next.

God designed us to be leaders. He gave Adam the responsibility to govern His earthy creation. It is very natural for man (mankind) to plan his work and then work his plan. In everyday life it is very unnatural to remain subservient to another person, and yet in the spiritual world, that is the very posture want us in. Man is to be in subjection to the Lord. Always.

2 Corinthians 10:5

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Spirituality is not instantaneous, nor is it guaranteed, it is a discipline to be learned, one step at a time. The epistles are packed full of motivational terms like believe, obey, walk, present, fight, reckon, hold fast, and pursue. The spiritual life is progressively cultivated in the disciplines of the faith; you will not awake one morning suddenly spiritual.

We grow in spiritual maturity as we hear and obey the Word of God. Spiritual maturity is characterized by the ability to recognize and apply the principles of Scripture to our everyday lives.

Hebrews 5:11-6:1

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

Without a personal commitment to an inward change, believers will be dominated, motivated, and manipulated by the cultural network of human society.

For many people, the word “discipline” reeks with negative connotations. It is often associated with legalism and bondage, but the discipline of the new testament is really the only key to spiritual freedom. If we are not under the control of the Holy Spirit, we are under the domination of the flesh. There is no middle ground.

Romans 6:16-18

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

What Would Jesus Do?

Jesus had a singular desire in life; to please His Father. This was not something that came natural to Him just because His name was Jesus. He wasn't programmed to seek God's will, it was something He disciplined Himself to do.

Hebrews 5:7-9

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

If we really desire to know what Jesus would do in a given situation, we should examine those things in His life that shaped the way He thought. If we really want to imitate Christ we should start by imitating His habits. It takes great strength and resolve to overcome the distractions of this world and do the right thing. Strength is a matter of

training and exercise; resolve is a matter of character. Both come at the price of discipline.

Christ engaged in the disciplines of solitude, silence, simplicity, study, prayer, sacrificial service, and fasting.

Solitude

Christ spent much time alone. Wilderness, mountains, gardens, and perhaps many other hiding places were His occasional refuge. He occasionally distanced Himself from people not because He was a loner, but because He recognized the spiritual necessity of removing Himself from the noise of life to more clearly hear the voice of His Father.

While solitude is very difficult for many people, it is probably the most fundamental discipline because it separates us from the noise and clatter of the world machine, and allows us serious one-on-one time with the Lord. The idea is to separate ourselves from the competing influences of peers and loved ones alike, for the sole purpose of basking in anonymity.

In this very private place called solitude we discover dependence, reflection, purpose and identity. It is here that we can see clearly, and confront directly, those areas of our lives that are not reflecting the image of Jesus Christ. Introspection is a very powerful tool when communing with the Lord in private.

Silence

Silence goes part and parcel with solitude, but they are not synonymous. You can be in solitude and not be silent. Modern technology has seen to that. Silence is totally at odds with the clamor of our culture. We live in a world that thrives on noise. When real life is too quiet, we generate noise to get us through the boring parts. We even have portable noise-making devices of all kinds so we never have to be quiet.

This discipline relates not only to finding places of silence in our surroundings, but also times of restricted speech in the presence of others.

Isaiah 30:15

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.

Silence in the presence of others is a rare occurrence. Our society teaches us to be opinionated. It is our Constitutional and human right to be heard. We are taught from an early age that our opinion is important. Scripture has a different view.

James 1:19-20

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

James 1:26

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

Proverbs 10:19

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Silence not only increases our poise and credibility, but it also enables us to be better observers, and more effective caretakers.

Silence is the humble resignation of our ambition to be the center of attention, and our hunger for public credibility. It is the purposeful determination to listen quietly to the Lord's council rather than profundicate our own importance.

Only in our silence can we hear the still, small voice of our God. Only when we hear that voice can we be certain of what to do next. Life is a noisy, confusing blur. Silence before God is our hope for clarity.

Prayer

Prayer is personal communion with the living God. It is the most intimate, candid conversation possible for human beings. Talking with God, we bare our souls and confess our downfalls that we could never to even to our closest relations. We can tell God everything, our fears, our fantasies, our hurts, our hopes- there is literally nothing we cannot tell to

God. We feel this incredible freedom because we have the assurance that He knows about everything long before we muster up the courage to tell Him.

The fabulous part is that even though He knows everything, He allows us to come into His presence without fear that He won't listen to us. Prayer is the ultimate freedom.

Psalm 116:1-2

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

Jeremiah 33:2-3

"This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it--the LORD is his name: 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

Thoughts on Prayer

Humility

You are in the unmediated presence of The Holy God who is like a blazing light and a consuming fire, before whom all things are known. Judge yourself to be certain that you are approaching Him in complete honesty and openness, with no barriers of unconfessed sin. God hates sin and cover-ups. This is not a casual conversation with a close buddy, this is a privileged audience before the King of the universe

Come Quietly

Practice times of silence before the Lord so you can be sensitive to the promptings of His Spirit. Remember, prayer is a two-way conversation, but remember also who has more right to talk. Listen more, talk less.

Recognize His Presence

Prayer was designed to be a way of life, not a scheduled segment of time. Praying without ceasing will become a reality the more we recognize that God the Spirit is in our presence perpetually.

Study and Meditation

All Believers are “born again.” This means that a new spiritual life has begun in the midst of an old flesh body. Just like the flesh, the spirit must be nourished every day to sustain its life.

We have no trouble remembering to feed our bodies because deep-seated habits and physical hunger pangs won’t let us. Going without nourishment at least twice every day is highly unusual, in fact serious munching between meals is “normal” in our society. There is more emphasis on eating “healthy snacks” than on abstaining from them.

We can learn a lot about spiritual nourishment causes and effects, by observing our physical eating habits. The lessons to be learned are amazingly appropriate.

For example, we know that breakfast and lunch are the most critical nourishment intake times of the day, but most of us quickly gobble something small and sweet for breakfast, and then cram fat and cholesterol for lunch. The net result is a short-lived burst of energy at the beginning of the day, and drowsiness in the afternoon. How different our bodies would be if we ate a nutritious, balanced breakfast (fueling-up and warming-up the engine), and ate a light, healthy lunch (topping-off the tank), and adding to this regimen regular daily exercise (scheduled maintenance).

In exactly the same way, if we nourished our spirit “body” with the correct fuel at disciplined intervals, and then exercised our spiritual “thought life” daily, our spiritual lives would be flourishing. It all revolves around personal discipline, and doing what we already know is right.

Deuteronomy 8:2-6

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.

Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him.

1 Timothy 4:6-8

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

The spirit-life born into us from the new birth must be fed in the same way that our physical bodies must be fed. Nourishment deprivation of either begins weakening the organism, just as the absence of exercise starts the atrophy process in both.

The only food that the spirit-life can assimilate is food from the Spirit. For this new life to grow, it must be fed and exercised regularly. We would never think of feeding our physical bodies just once or twice a week, but too often we ignore the needs of our spiritual life.

How can this happen? Why do we not feel the “hunger pangs” of the Spirit? Perhaps we are too busy pampering our earth-bound bodies to notice. One thing is certain... we will lose the usefulness of any part of our being -physical or spiritual- that is deprived of nutrition and exercise. If your spiritual perception is impaired, and your hunger for closeness with the Lord has diminished, then regular spiritual nutrition is the answer. Much more than your body, your spirit has amazing recoverability. It is NEVER too late to renew your spirit.

Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

A major problem is that most people are daunted by the prospect of personal Bible study, since they have little idea what to do. The hit-or-miss approach of Bible roulette provides little chance for spiritual nourishment.

This is why too many Christians have a second-hand knowledge of Scripture, and rely almost exclusively on input from teachers and pastors. Try studying the Word of God using one or these defined methods.

1) The topical method sets aim at a particular subject, freeing you to examine a number of books that address that topic. For this kind of study, it is good to have a concordance or topical guide (Nave's Topical Bible is a good start) to help you locate passages to study.

2) Studying biographically is the examination of particular people in the Bible. A study of Paul, Peter, David, or Abraham are great places to start. Christian book stores carry a number of great biographies about great people in the Bible.

3) Studying a particular book in the Bible is perhaps the most popular method of study, with the books of John, Romans, or Proverbs leading the choice of books.

Meditation

It is impossible to think about nothing. The human mind is always thinking. When you ask someone what they are thinking, and they say "nothing," be assured that this is not true. There may be no particular focus, but "thinking" is

taking place. Since the mind is always thinking about something, the real issue is what the mind is thinking.

Consider the proverb:

Sow a thought, reap an act; Sow an act, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, reap a destiny.

Many believers have become suspicious of meditation, since they think it only refers to the consciousness-voiding techniques of Buddhism, Hinduism, and the New Age movement. But the Psalms make it clear that a biblical approach to meditation does not empty the consciousness, but fills the mind with the truth of God's Word.

John 15:4-8

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Remain, in this verse, refers to an active state of dependence. The spirit-life was never designed to be a passive relationship. Believers are to stay "on the vine," constantly infusing their life with nourishment from the Spirit, AND mentally dwelling on the Word. Notice that when we are so aligned, God's floodgates of provision are opened wide. Do notice though, that living an earthly existence apart from this focus yields a life of spiritual detachment. The nourishment only flows when BOTH sides want a relationship.

Romans 8:3-9

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful

man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

With all the subtlety of a stick of dynamite, Paul lays out a simple but very profound spiritual postulate. Minds of believers that are trained on the Lord live in a constant state of life and peace. Minds of believers that are not trained on the Lord live in the constant state of death.

So, is what your mind thinks about important? Only if you want to experience vibrant life instead of just survive day-to-day. Any boat without a rudder, no matter how beautiful its appearance, is at the mercy of the current around it. Many believers are “lost at sea” and don’t even know it.

When your life lacks meaning and direction, consider the possibility that you may have arrived at that state through simple spiritual neglect. But also realize that the condition can be quickly turned around by reattaching yourself to the true vine, and training your mind on Christ.

Colossians 2:6-8

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Satan is alive and capable of taking anybody captive through the (hollow and deceptive) philosophy of this world. Satan is intent on taking you captive right in your own back yard.

Colossians 3:1-2

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

“Set your mind” has a definitive ring to it. This is not a polite suggestion or a helpful hint, it is a serious command. Guard your yard!

Philippians 4:8

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.

Meditation 101. On what should you focus your thought life? The good stuff. Don't get negative, you don't have the right. Thinking negatively is nothing more than being judgmental, and we haven't the right to judge anything or anybody, that is Christ's job. Count your blessings, name them one-by-one.

Psalms 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Oh LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Josua 1:8

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Psalms 1:1-3

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

2 Peter 1:8-15

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Meditation directs the conscious mind during the day, and is an excellent way to practice the presence of God. The HWLW habit (His Word- last word) programs the subconscious mind during the night.

THIS is meditation, this is the way. What pleases the Lord? Actions and attitude. Speak blessings to others and focus your thought life on how great your God is. This pleases the Lord.

4. Motivated Spirituality

The Search for Meaning

What makes us behave the way we do? Why do we sometimes behave in a Godly manner, and other times completely lose it?

We all need the “big 3,” security, significance, and fulfillment, but we too often turn to the wrong dispensary to get those needs filled. This chapter will focus on getting our needs met by Jesus Christ instead of swallowing sugar pills from the pharmacy of this world. Believers have a choice, though most of us still follow the unbelieving crowd. But why?

Marketing works!

We were all born with an “input receiver” in our minds pre-tuned to the Prince of the Powers of the Air. This tuner continually blares the propaganda of the world. The noise goes on, day and night, continuously. Noise and glitter are the marketing vehicles of the world. Like too many movies, this world must keep the action and noise levels hot and heavy for fear they will lose their audience. Satan has nothing to offer but flash and sensation, so his media barrage stays at a fever pitch.

Unbelievers have no way to receive spiritual blessings. They’re tuners can’t receive Godly guidelines. Unbelievers are doomed to follow blindly the rhythm of the world.

Mark 7:21

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Believers, on the other hand, have the option of “tuning in” the Word of God. At their new birth God implanted a Spirit-tuned receiver in their hearts. The Lord works through a quiet spirit, and communes through a meditating heart. When believers get caught-up in the world’s frenzy, they hear only Satan’s propaganda and consequently seek purpose and meaning from unspiritual sources.

It is the believer's option which station he will tune in. God doesn't force His way into anyone's life. Not even a believer's. Unfortunately, we can't listen to both God and Satan at the same time, even though we think we can. One station at a time. That's the rule.

Matthew 6:24

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

Joshua 24:15

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Horizontal Motivators- The kind of motivation promoted by the world's station appeals to the here and now issues. These include concerns like fear of loss, guilt, pride, personal gain, reputation, prestige and pleasure. These are very real issues, but they are horizontal issues. They apply only this life and offer no provision for life beyond these years.

Believers are certainly not immune to these concerns. We don't lose our human desires when we accept Christ. We, like everybody else, are plagued by these things throughout our lives.

Vertical Motivators- Each of the following items is capable of motivating us toward eternal goals. The process of vertical motivation is a life-long undertaking, requiring sometimes many different "appeals" during our life-walk. It is important to realize and expect that we will be pulled by the natural and spiritual- the horizontal and the vertical.

This is why it is important to not get caught in the "paralysis of analysis." This is the fear of being called hypocritical. None of us want people to know that we are struggling with unresolved issues in our lives. We're afraid to "get really involved" with the Lord until we're better prepared. If we wait until we have totally pure thoughts and unalloyed motivations to get into the fight, we will probably never get started.

There are seven items we will examine in our quest for vertical motivation.

a) No other options

When we come to Christ we are effectively admitting the inadequacy of every other approach to life.

John 6:66-69

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Although this is a negative approach, it is a profound discovery and a powerful motivator. There comes a time when we recognize that our experience with Christ has far transcended curiosity and even gone beyond being convinced. When we realize that there is simply no other answer to meaning in life, we are committed.

In a universe without God, there is no source of ultimate meaning. The universe is expanding, and left to itself, the galaxies will grow farther apart and the stars will eventually burn out. All will be cold, dark, and lifeless.

On the scale of cosmic time, the human race (let alone the life of an individual) flashes into existence for the briefest moment before passing into nothingness. From an ultimate standpoint, all is meaningless, since no one will be left to remember in the endless cosmic night. Without God, and immortality, our life, and indeed that of the whole human race, is merely an episode between two oblivions.

We may have the illusion of meaning because others are still around, but in the long run, all of us will disappear, and our work and sacrifice will make no difference to an impersonal and indifferent cosmos.

Similarly, without a personal God, there is no basis for morality, since values of right and wrong are totally relative and have no absolute mooring. If we are the product of an accidental combination of molecules in an ultimately impersonal universe, human values such as honesty, brotherhood, love, and equality have no more cosmic significance than treachery, selfishness, hatred, and prejudice.

We are stripped of purpose in a godless reality. An impersonal universe is bereft of purpose and plan; in the final analysis it moves only toward decay, disorder and death. It is Macbeth's "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." We may try to embrace some short-term purposes, but seen from the larger perspective, they are pointless, because the universe itself is pointless.

Occasionally every believer questions the validity of the Christian life, and wonders if the whole Christian experience is really worth it. It is at times like these that this "negative motivator" comes strongly into focus.

If not Christ-- then what?

If the Christian life is not the way, then what is?

Either Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, or He is not. There is no middle ground. And if He is who He claims to be, then there is absolutely no meaning, no method, no answer, and no fulfillment apart from Him. The honesty of this admission answers a profound need.

b) Fear

This can be both negative (fear of consequences) or positive (fear of God).

2 Corinthians 5:10-11a

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

Fear is hardly mentioned in evangelical circles at all, let alone as a source of behavioral motivation, but even a brief glimpse at a concordance reveals that the fear of God is highly prized not only in the Old Testament as well as the New. Paul obviously found great purpose in fearing God, as much of his admonition to others and declarations about himself reveal.

1 Corinthians 9:16

...I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

What does it mean to “fear God?”

Luke 12:4-5

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

Christ had to correct a serious misconception. While the disciples knew what fear was when it came to human adversaries, they did not understand how much more devastating it was to anger God. Too often we hear only of the inexhaustible love of God, but we need to grasp the absolute justice of God also. While God loves us unconditionally, He demands obedience. God’s mercy does not condone or overlook our disobedience.

We fear things we cannot control. We fear things that are more powerful than we are... things that have the power to overrule us in spite of our strongest resistance. We fear the IRS, bullies, old age, bad habits, personal inadequacies, authority figures and a host of other uncontrollable forces. The word fear has (at least) two meanings. One positive, and one negative, but both motivational.

Positive

Children fear their parents not because their parents intend to do them harm, but because their parents can keep them from harm. We are happy to follow strong leadership because without that leadership we might fall victim of our own ignorance. We place ourselves voluntarily in subjection to lawyers, counselors and teachers when we believe they

possess more knowledge than we do, and that their expertise can both educate us and can keep us out of trouble. Respect of an advocate is nothing more than a positive form of fear.

Negative

The fear we have of fire, heights, prison, and electricity are very healthy examples of negative fears. Healthy simply because they cause us to have respect for things that can cause us harm.

If there is no fear of punishment for disobedience, there is little incentive to obey rules. If parents didn't fear electrocution, they'd let their babies play with car keys around electrical sockets. The natural tendency for all humans is to "do their own thing." If there was no fear of consequences for inappropriate behavior, this world would be mired in total chaos. Fear keeps us from destroying ourselves.

Scripture clearly equates the fear of God with knowing Him, loving Him, obeying Him, and honoring Him.

Exodus 20:20

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

Deuteronomy 5:29

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

Deuteronomy 10:12

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Job 28:28

And he said to man, "The fear of the Lord--that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding."

2 Corinthians 2 7:1

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

1 Peter 1:17

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

The fear of the Lord not only means reverential awe of God, but also reflects what our attitude should be as a subject in Christ's kingdom. It is the full realization that the King has all power and authority in His hand, and that the subject's (our) life, occupation, and future are dependent on His good pleasure. It is the ultimate awareness of His sovereignty and the fact that our lives are in His hands. The fear of the Lord is the foundation for wisdom because it leads to a sense of profound dependency, submission, and trust. A fundamental understanding that we are Christ's servants should be the cornerstone of our motivational structure.

Luke 17:7-10

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'?

Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'?

Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

It can draw us away from the folly of trusting in people more than trusting in God. It is a fundamental spiritual blunder to be more concerned about pleasing people than about pleasing God, and to be more afraid of human disapproval than divine disapproval.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding

Love and gratitude

The third biblical motivator is more positive in nature: it is the pure response of love and gratitude. The love of God continues to be given freely, without prompt or deserve. As scripture states, the only way we can truly love is by understanding the love of God.

I John 4:8-10

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The inventor of love reached down to us even when we were His enemies, content in our own meaninglessness. God did not respond to the goodness of man. Man has always been spiritually inept and morally depraved. If God had not taken the initiative, we would not know freedom from sin's bondage... nor would we have even known our own helplessness.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us

Because of His work, the way has been opened for those who were totally inept and helpless to become God's beloved children, members of His family forever. This love humbles us because it is undeserved and we are unworthy, but it elevates us because when we come through His Son, nothing we do can separate us from His love.

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The more we meditate on the scope of God's gift of His divine love, the more we are drawn to reciprocation of His love. This takes the form of revering God and seeking His approval. It also inspires us to love others freely and without cause or provocation. The security and significance of God's relentless love gives us the ability (and the impetus) to act in tangible ways of loving service to others

John 15:9-10

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

Notice that there is a mandatory relationship between abiding in the love of Christ and keeping His commandments if we wish to please the Lord. When we dwell in the "space" of His unmerited love, we see that His commandments are not legalistic but liberating. Abiding in His love, we become more inclined to obey Him not only because it is in our own best interests, but because it is pleasing to Him.

2 Corinthians 5:9

We have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

The ambitions of this world are tied more directly than indirectly to personal selfishness, but the ambition of a true disciple is not exaltation of self but exaltation of Christ. As we grow in maturity, our motivational structure is shaped more and more by Christ's love for us and our developing love for Him.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

This relationship is reciprocal; the more we love Him, the more we will enjoy obeying Him; the more we obey Him, the more we will grow in our personal knowledge and love for Him. This is the circle of true life. It is a process that is self-perpetuating by God's decree.

There are two questions that can help you assess where you are in this spiritual process:

1) Do you love God more for Himself than for His gifts and benefits?

2) Are you more motivated to seek His glory and honor than you are to seek your own?

These questions are not meant to be trivial, neither should they be considered lightly. If they are pondered quietly before the Lord, they can be painfully revealing.

John 14:15, 21, 23-24

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.... He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words.

If we consider the depth and breadth of God's care and blessings in our lives, we will realize that it is only right that we should give thanks in everything

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

How sad that we are more inclined to view our lives in terms of what we lack than what we have been blessed with. Instead of seeing the fullness of what we have received in Christ, we tend to approach our experiences from a negative perspective.

Is gratitude to the Lord enough of a motivation to keep us focused on our appointed mission in this world?

Good question. The answer depends on a couple of issues. First we need to re-establish what God expects of us here on planet Earth. We can actually get our spiritual emotions so fixed on what has been done for us that we forget that God redeemed us for a very important reason. Don't forget... while it is very comforting to bask in the love of God, there is

still a very real, very desperate spiritual war going on all around us. These two facts are eternally entwined. We were purchased by love, and we were purchased for a purpose. One without the other is only half the story.

The vast majority of Christianity is focused so heavily on the redemption act, fixating so exhaustively on the glory of the gift and shouting in “holy pep rallies,” that the concept of “reasonable service” has been limited to rejoicing in the love of God. Very few choruses and hymns (written or sung in the last fifty years) and even fewer sermons focus on the *reason* for the redemption.

There was a war waged before the beginning of time, and believers of all ages have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of participating in this war. The war is one of allegiance and its outcome is determined by obedience. Believers are enlisted to serve under their commander Jesus Christ. The war is for the souls of men. Believers eternal destiny was sealed by Christ’s payment, Satan’s attack is never for man’s spirit, it is for his soul.

The soul is the seat of the emotions and the direction of the heart.

Rewards.

There will be total accountability before God. All people will be required to give an account to God for their life, but there will be a profound difference between God's judgment of believers and unbelievers. Entrance into heaven is based solely on the grace of God. This is a very good thing since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

God's justice would mean that all would be eternally separated from the holiness of God, but God's grace offers us far more than justice requires.

Just as there will be degrees of punishment for unbelievers in Hell... there will also be degrees of reward in Heaven for the believer. While salvation is by grace, rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven are based on works. This means that the direction, structure, and actions of our lives on this planet have eternal consequences, and that how we live in

this temporal realm will have a direct bearing on the quality of our eternity.

Whether we like it or not, each one of us is accountable to God, and no one will escape His righteous judgment. Unbelievers will face the Great White Throne Judgment and will be judged on the basis of their works.

Without the blood of Christ to pay for their sins, the judgment of their works will determine their degree of abandonment in Hell. Death means separation, and in this sense, the separation is the most horrifying of all, separation from companionship. There is nothing more dreadful than isolation and darkness. Prisons have used solitary confinement as the ultimate punishment for misbehavior.

Revelation 20:11-15

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ where their works will also be judged. Even though believers are given eternal life, and communion with the Lord, the Judgment Seat will determine our proximity to Christ in the Millennial Kingdom.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Too often the Judgment Seat is portrayed (when it is portrayed at all) as an awards ceremony, where almost everybody will receive something nice, and the absolute worse case will be to watch others get awards that we could have won if we had only “applied ourselves.” This kind of Pollyanna conjecture may feel warm and fuzzy, but is certainly not Scriptural.

The Judgment Seat will work two ways... it will reward those parts of our lives that honored the Lord by obedience to His Word and subjection to His Spirit, and it will trash and burn those areas of our lives that were not in total accordance with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Most of us will be shocked at the amount of our lives that were lived selfishly.

John 5:24

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Believers have been delivered from condemnation (in the eternal sense), since Christ bore their judgment and gave them His life. The Judgment Seat is not intended to condemn “believers,” it is intended to judge believers’ use of their earthly lives. It is God’s fruit inspection.

*"it's easy to lip-synch in the chorus of life, but each of us will have to sing solo before God."
-Kenneth Boa*

When we accept Christ, He becomes the foundation of our life and the basis of our entrance into heaven. The superstructure we each build upon this foundation consists of the activities we participate in everyday. Most likely, there will be very few huge beams and columns (monumental activities) in our structures, most of the building components will consist of thoughts, attitudes, daily activities, intents of the heart and associations.

While most lives are truly lived “in quiet desperation,” we will discover that the majority of life’s situations, the ones we deemed critically important in this life, will be considered as fire-food at the Judgment Seat.

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

At the Judgment Seat, the entire superstructure of our lives will be set on fire to test the quality of our “building materials.” We will be rewarded for those things that endure the test of fire (gold, silver, precious stones) and suffer loss for that which is burned up (wood, hay, straw). In view of the fact that believers can be disqualified from rewards through lack of faithfulness or receive the approval of God because of faithfulness, it is a deadly mistake to live a life of complacency acting as though there is no day of reckoning.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

2 Timothy 2:12

if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Philippians 3:10-14

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

James 3:1

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

The fear of loss and the hope of reward are two legitimate biblical motivators, and Christ stressed their importance on multiple occasions

Matthew 6:19-20

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Matthew 19:27-29

Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Luke 12:42-44

The Lord answered, Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?

It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

John 12:25-26

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Revelation 22:12

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

Christ used three parables to describe certain “conditions” He uses for rewards. It is quite different from the criteria the world uses to determine compensation.

The first is the parable of the vineyard...

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.

About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ “ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius.

So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.

Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Rewards are not based on the amount of time one labors in God's vineyard. It is completely up to God to determine the amount of this world's goods we are loaned and the length of time we are entrusted with them. Our responsibility relates to the way we invest the time we have been granted, whether we are given one or seventy years after accepting Christ.

The parable of the talents states the same principle.

Matthew 25:14-30

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

This parable, as well as the following parable of the minas teaches us the importance of obedience to God for the sake of obedience, and leaving the rewards up to Him

Luke 19:12-27

He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’

“ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

“Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ “‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’”

“He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them —bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”

These three parables teach us that rewards are neither based on the gifts and abilities we have received nor on the level of our productivity. Instead, they are determined by the degree of our faithfulness to the opportunities we have been given.

If rewards were based on time, talent, or treasure, those who are relatively rich in these assets would be rewarded for possessing things that actually come from God’s goodness.

The fact that rewards are based on faithfulness to the assets and opportunities we have been given, is the divine equalizer that gives every believer, regardless of economic, social, intellectual, or vocational status, the possibility of being approved by God.

Faithfulness relates to the stewardship of assets and resources of another. There are five facets of stewardship that include time, talent, treasure, truth and relationships.

Here again, the question is not how much truth we have been exposed to or the size of our relational influence, but what we are doing with the truth and the people God has put in our lives. Faithfulness also relates to our obedience as well as the way we respond to the circumstances in which we have been placed. God's approval relates more to the focus of our heart than to measurable religious achievements.

Although Scripture frequently encourages us to pursue reward with God, it tells us little about the nature and content of that reward, but we can be well assured that they will be worth any earthly sacrifice to gain.

The Two Aspects of Rewards.

The first relates to greater responsibility in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Luke 16:10-12

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Luke 19:17-19

Well done, my good servant! his master replied. Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities. The second came and said, Sir, your mina has earned five more. His master answered, You take charge of five cities.

Believers will be granted different levels of authority based solely on their faithfulness on earth. This life is a training ground, or boot camp, for believers, en route to a commissioned assignment in the next life, specifically the Kingdom reign of Jesus Christ.

When we sing the chorus It Will be Worth it All, this is what we are singing about. Heaven is not a reward for the sacrifices made in this life, but a commission from the King to serve in His administration is the grandest reward imaginable. Only then will we know how “worth it” it was.

The second area is the degree to which we will reflect and display the glory and character of Christ throughout eternity.

Daniel 12:2-3

And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever

I Corinthians 15:40-41

There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.

The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

When believers refuse the accolades and the limelight offered by this world, choosing to rather magnify the Lord than themselves, God notices. He has called us to a life rich in humility and ministry to others, rather than a life filled with the currency of this world.

This world's valuation amounts to little more than asphalt in the city of God. Appearing before the King, bearing only the gift of street dirt will only serve as an insult, but appearing before Him in the white robes of righteousness, and clothed in humility, will bring great honor to Him.

Luke 16:15

...that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God

God's reward for this allegiance will be grand and everlasting. Since there will be a day of reckoning, we would be wise to order our lives with this truth in mind. The Bible calls us away from a mind-set of complacency to the pursuit of discipleship and fruit-bearing. It cautions us not to be seduced by the things our culture declares to be important.

The vast bulk of what the world tells us to pursue is directly related to the opinions of others. But in the end, people's opinions will be irrelevant. We will stand alone before Christ. The world won't even be there!

It would seem that the apostle Paul had only two days on his calendar: today and that day (the day he would stand before Christ), and he lived every "today" in light of "that day." He reveled in God's great gift of justification and encouraged believers to grow in sanctification, but his great hope was in God's promise of glorification.

Romans 8:18

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Notice the overt reference here to the fruits of our labors lasting forever. Catch the subtle, but clear distinction between the gift of salvation and the reward for obedience. Paul made it very clear that light and momentary troubles (suffering loss of earthly status, approval, and acclaim) troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory. Did you catch it? Our rewards for a sacrificial, obedient life go on forever.

A quick note is necessary here for those who think either that:

- 1) our rewards last only during the Kingdom, then we will throw our crowns at Christ's feet, or
- 2) since God is no respecter of persons, upon receiving our rewards, we will immediately throw our crowns at Christ's feet.

While this may sound like a terribly humble and noble thing to do, it reveals a shallow understanding of God's eternal purpose, and diminishes the importance of pleasing God.

The argument goes something like this...

When we fully appreciate the magnitude of God's gift of eternal life, and fully understand that God loves us 'just the way we are,' we will cease trying to please Him, simply because we neither can, nor have to do so. Our relationship with God is not based on our performance, but on His inexhaustible love.

The reasoning goes on...

Believers are totally accepted by Him without any of need of performing for Him. God certainly knows we are only human and He loves us in spite of it. Since we can't please God by our efforts, it would be ludicrous to accept a reward for something we didn't (and couldn't) do. Therefore, the only reasonable response to being awarded a crown by Jesus Christ, would to give it back to Him immediately. Only Christ our King is worthy of a crown.

Statements like this are proof of a shallow understanding of the God's reward system, and represent deception from the pit of Hell. There is just enough humility in the statement to sound properly meek, and just enough poisonous misinterpretation to halt a Christian soldier in the midst of the fight. Yes, God loves us unconditionally, and without provocation, but He expects personal holiness and a disciplined life. God provides all the power and direction for our earthly lives, asking only that we prefer His will over our own.

While He has every right to demand obedience, and indeed promises "just recompense" for our earthly activities... good and bad, He mercifully rewards obedience. For the most humble servants, He promises a crown...

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

The favorite (and only) passage used in the argument concerning crowns is:

Revelations 4:10-11

the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

This passage is used to (supposedly) show that believers will give their crowns back to the Lord in a gesture of appreciation and humility. Unfortunately, there are five significant problems with this interpretation.

First, this scene takes place before the Judgment Seat even occurs, making it difficult for it to be referring to believers and their rewards.

Second, the passage refers to the twenty four elders who are relinquishing their crowns, not believers.

Third, these elders represent God's current administration (the remaining faithful two-thirds of governing angels).

Fourth the elder's crowns are given back to "He who sits upon the throne," who is God the Father, not Christ.

And last, these crowns will be re-distributed to those believers who have earned them.

What is missing most with this interpretation is a basic understanding of the meaning behind the crown. This is no token of God's appreciation, it is Christ's designation of those that will share in His rule over planet Earth. It is the highest form of God's approval. The thought of (even humbly) refusing this honor is to dishonor the giver, Jesus Christ.

It is a sacred honor to receive a crown from your Lord. It is the most profound assurance of His approval. It is worth dying for.

1Corinthians 3:13-14

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

Colossians 2:16

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility...

Colossians 3:22

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God;

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Scripture teaches that it is not mercenary to be motivated by reward; instead, Jesus encouraged us to long to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord." The New Testament is replete with exhortations to pursue God's rewards, affirming that they are more than worth the cost.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him....

I John 3:2-3

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (Glory). And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

*"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."
--C. S. Lewis*

In comparison to what God wants to give us, the best this world can offer is toys, trinkets, and tinsel. We should be motivated by the fact that right now we are in the process of becoming what we will be in eternity. We should give it everything we have because eternal gain will be worth anything we sacrificed in our brief earthly sojourn.

If believers' rewards are perceived in the earthly manner of county fair blue ribbons or plastic trophies awarded for sports participation,

their true scriptural meaning and purpose is demeaned at best, and possibly lost altogether. Too often Christians diminish the incredible importance of their lives here on Earth. This is neither a dress rehearsal nor a spiritual recess.

There is a bigger picture than many believers realize. What possesses the minds and time of believers in this life determines and position and possessions for eternity. This life brings huge consequences- both good and bad. There is a war between our God and the lord of this earthly “slum.” The battlefield is the body of believers, and the fight is for their souls. Believers can truly “gain the whole world, and yet lose their own soul.” Losing one’s soul does not mean losing their salvation, but it could mean disqualification for the position God called them to hold.