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## Forward

The heavenly reward is not just for giants of the faith, like Paul, but for all who are eagerly looking forward to Jesus' second coming.

Paul gave these words to encourage Timothy, and to us, that no matter how difficult the fight seems—keep fighting. When we are with Jesus Christ, we will discover that it was all worth it.

Although Paul would not receive an earthly reward, he would be rewarded in heaven. Whatever we may face—discouragement, persecution, or death—we know our reward is with Christ in heaven.

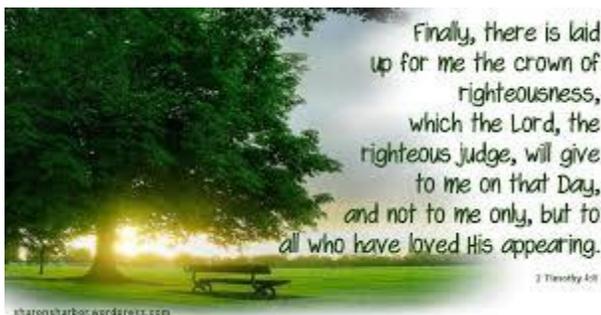
We will see that our suffering is worthwhile when we achieve our goal of glorifying God, winning people to Christ, and one day living eternally with him.

In this study as you sign up, “Accept Christ”, for the prize, you will  
Be challenged to stay faithful until the end.

If we have been faithful, we will receive the prize of victory.

Registering for the prize will bring a great reward.

## Chapter 1



### A Crown of Righteousness

**2 Tim. 4:7-8**

**I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return.**

As he neared the end of his life, Paul could confidently say he had been faithful to his call. Thus he faced death calmly, knowing that Christ would reward him. Is your life preparing you for death? Do you share Paul's confident expectation of meeting Christ?

The good news is that the heavenly reward is not just for giants of the faith, like Paul, but for all who are eagerly looking forward to Jesus' second coming. Paul gave these words to encourage Timothy, and us, that no matter how difficult the fight seems—keep fighting. When we are with Jesus Christ, we will discover that it was all worth it.

In Roman athletic games, a laurel wreath was given to the winners. A symbol of triumph and honor, it was the most coveted prize in ancient

Rome. This is probably what Paul was referring to when he spoke of a “crown.” But his would be a crown of righteousness.

Although Paul would not receive an earthly reward, he would be rewarded in heaven. Whatever we may face—discouragement, persecution, or death—we know our reward is with Christ in heaven.

## **The Promised Crown of Life**

**James 1:12**

**God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.**

The crown of life is like the victory wreath given to winning athletes (see 1 Cor. 9:25). God’s crown of life is not glory and honor here on earth, but the reward of eternal life—living with God forever. The way to be in God’s winners’ circle is by loving him and staying faithful even under pressure.

## **A share in God’s glory**

**1 Peter 5:4**

**And when the head Shepherd comes, your reward will be a never-ending share in his glory and honor.**

We often worry about our position and status, hoping to get proper recognition for what we do. But Peter advises us to remember that God’s recognition counts more than human praise. God is able and

willing to bless us according to his timing. Humbly obey God regardless of present circumstances, and in his good time—either in this life or in the next—he will lift you up.

### **Do the work assigned you**

#### **Acts 20:24**

**But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.**

We often feel that life is a failure unless we're getting a lot out of it: recognition, fun, money or success. But Paul considered life worth *nothing* unless he used it for God's work. What he put *into* life was far more important than what he got out. Which is more important to you—what you get out of life, or what you put into it?

Single-mindedness is a quality needed by anyone who wishes to do God's work. Paul was a single-minded person, and the most important goal of his life was to tell others about Christ (Phil. 3:7-13). It is no wonder that Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived. God is looking for more men and women who focus on that one great task God has given them to do.

### **The Priceless gain of knowing Christ**

#### **Philip. 3:7-8**

**I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.**

**Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ.**

**Philip. 3:7**

**I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.**

Be careful of considering past achievements so important that they get in the way of your relationship with Christ.

After Paul considered everything he had accomplished in his life, he said that it was all “a loss” when compared with the greatness of knowing Christ. This is a profound statement about values: a person’s relationship with Christ is more important than anything else.

To know Christ should be our ultimate goal. Consider your values. Do you place anything above your relationship with Christ? If your priorities are wrong, how will you reorder them?

**Your work is not useless**

**Philip. 2:16**

**Hold tightly to the word of life, so that when Christ returns. I will be proud that I did not lose the race and that my work was not useless.**

Our lives should be characterized by moral purity, patience, and peacefulness, so that we will “shine like stars” in a dark and depraved world.

A transformed life is an effective witness to the power of God’s Word. Are you shining brightly, or do complaining and arguing cloud you? Shine out for God.

## **Run with endurance**

### **Hebrews 12:1**

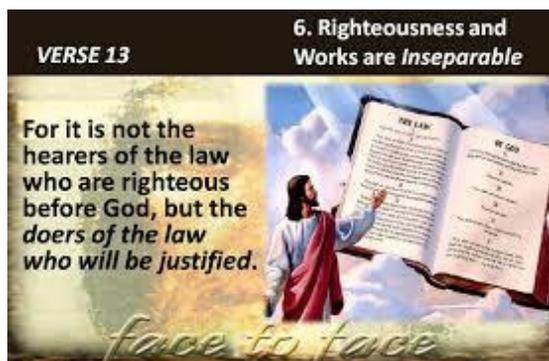
**Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.**

This “great cloud of witnesses” is composed of the people described in Hebrews 11. Their faithfulness is a constant encouragement to us. We do not struggle alone, and we are not the first to struggle with the problems we face. Others have run the race and won, and their witness stirs us to run and win also. What an inspiring heritage we have!

The Christian life involves hard work. It requires us to give up whatever endangers our relationship with God, to run patiently, and to struggle against sin with the power of the Holy Spirit. To live effectively, we must keep our eyes on Jesus. We will stumble if we look away from him to stare at ourselves or at the circumstances surrounding us. We should be running for Christ, not ourselves, and we must always keep him in sight.



## Chapter 2



**Faithfulness brings a crown of life**

**Rev. 2:10**

**Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 'ten days.' Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

Smyrna was famous for its athletic games. A crown was the victory wreath, the trophy for the champion at the games.

If we have been faithful, we will receive the prize of victory—eternal life (James 1:12). The message to the Smyrna church was to remain faithful during their suffering because God is in control and his promises are reliable. Jesus never says that by being faithful to him we will avoid troubles, suffering, and persecution.

Rather, we must be faithful to him *in* our sufferings. Only then will our faith prove to be genuine. We remain faithful by keeping our eyes on Christ and on what he promises us now and in the future (see Phil. 3:13-14; 2 Tim. 4:8).

Believers and unbelievers alike experience physical death. All people will be resurrected, but believers will be resurrected to eternal life with God while unbelievers will be resurrected to be punished with a second death,

**No one will take away your crown.**

**Rev. 3:11**

**Look, I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown.**

Christians have differing gifts, abilities, experience, and maturity. God doesn't expect us all to be and act the same, but he does expect us to "hold on" to what we have, to persevere in using our resources for him.

The Philadelphians are commended for their effort to obey (Rev. 3:8) and encouraged to hold tightly to whatever strength they have.

You may be a new believer and feel that your faith and spiritual strength are little. Use what you have to live for Christ, and God will commend you.

## **Follow the rules to qualify**

**2 Tim. 2:5**

**Follow the Lord's rules for doing his work, just as an athlete either follows the rules or is disqualified and wins no prize.**

As Timothy preached and taught, he would face suffering, but he should be able to endure. Paul used a comparison with soldiers, athletes, and farmers who must discipline themselves and be willing to sacrifice to achieve the results they want. Like soldiers, we have to give up worldly security and endure rigorous discipline.

Like athletes, we must train hard and follow the rules. Like farmers, we must work extremely hard and be patient. But we keep going despite suffering because of the thought of victory, the vision of winning, and the hope of harvest.

We will see that our suffering is worthwhile when we achieve our goal of glorifying God, winning people to Christ, and one day living eternally with him.

## **Crown will not fade away**

**1 Cor. 9:25-27**

**All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. [26] So I run straight**

**to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches.**

**I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.**

Winning a race requires purpose and discipline. Paul uses this illustration to explain that the Christian life takes hard work, self-denial, and grueling preparation.

As Christians, we are running toward our heavenly reward. The essential disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship equip us to run with vigor and stamina.

Don't merely observe from the grandstand; don't just turn out to jog a couple of laps each morning. Train diligently—your spiritual progress depends upon it.

At times we must even give up something good in order to do what God wants. Each person's special duties determine the discipline and denial that he or she must accept.

Without a goal, discipline is nothing but self-punishment. With the goal of pleasing God, our denial seems like nothing compared to the eternal, imperishable reward that will be ours.

When Paul says he might be disqualified, he does not mean that he could lose his salvation, but rather that he could lose his privilege of telling others about Christ.

It is easy to tell others how to live and then not to take our own advice. We must be careful to practice what we preach.

## **Follow the truth**

### **Galatians 5:7**

**You were getting along so well. Who has interfered with you to hold you back from following the truth?**

We are saved by faith, not by deeds. But love for others and for God is the response of those whom God has forgiven. God's forgiveness is complete, and Jesus said that those who are forgiven much love much (Luke 7:47).

Because faith expresses itself through love, you can check your love for others as a way to monitor your faith.

## **Your ministry will not be useless**

### **Galatians 2:2**

**I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. While I was there I talked privately with the leaders of the church. I wanted them to understand what I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to**

**make sure they did not disagree, or my ministry would have been useless.**

God told Paul, through a revelation, to confer with the church leaders in Jerusalem about the message he was preaching to the Gentiles, so they would understand and approve of what he was doing.

The essence of Paul's message to both Jews and Gentiles was that God's salvation is offered to all people regardless of race, sex, nationality, wealth, social standing, educational level, or anything else. Anyone can be forgiven by trusting in Christ (see Romans 10:8-13).

Even though God had specifically sent him to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16), Paul needed to discuss his gospel message with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15).

This meeting prevented a major split in the church, and it formally acknowledged the apostles' approval of Paul's preaching.

Sometimes we avoid conferring with others because we fear that problems or arguments may develop. Instead, we should openly discuss our plans and actions with friends, counselors, and advisers.

Good communication helps everyone understand the situation better, it reduces gossip, and it builds unity in the church.

**Take no advice from the proud**

## Col. 2:18

**Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on self-denial. And don't let anyone say you must worship angels, even though they say they have had visions about this. These people claim to be so humble, but their sinful minds have made them proud.**

The false teachers were proud of their humility! This false humility brought attention and praise to themselves rather than to God.

True humility means seeing ourselves as we really are from God's perspective, and acting accordingly.

People today practice false humility when they talk negatively about themselves so that others will think they are spiritual. False humility is self-centered; true humility is God-centered.

The false teachers were claiming that God was far away and could be approached only through various levels of angels.

They taught that people had to worship angels in order, eventually, to reach God. This is unscriptural; the Bible teaches that angels are God's servants, and it forbids worshiping them (Exodus 20:3-4; Rev. 22:8-9). As you grow in your Christian faith, let God's Word be your guide, not the opinions of other people.

The expression "unspiritual mind" means that these people had a self-made religion. The false teachers were trying to deny the significance of the body by saying that it was evil, but their desire for attention from others showed that, in reality, they were obsessed with the physical realm.

## **The prize now awaits me**

**2 Tim. 4:8**

**And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but also for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return.**

To keep cool when you are jarred and jolted by people or circumstances, don't react quickly. In any work of ministry that you undertake, keeping your head makes you morally alert to temptation, resistant to pressure, and vigilant when facing heavy responsibility.

## Chapter 3



### Finish the race

#### 2 Tim. 4:7

**I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.**

Paul had finished his course. He was now ready to receive the prize that God had prepared for him.

If you feel like the race you are in for eternal life will never end, do not be discouraged, for your prize awaits for you.

#### 1 Cor. 9:24-27

**Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. [25] All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.**

**So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches.**

**I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.**

The Christian life involves both freedom and discipline.

The goals of Paul's life were to glorify God and bring people to Christ. Thus he stayed free of any philosophical position or material entanglement that might sidetrack him, while he strictly disciplined him to carry out his goal.

For Paul, both freedom and discipline were important tools to be used in God's service.

Paul gives several important principles for ministry:

- (1) Find common ground with those you contact;
- (2) Avoid a know-it-all attitude;
- (3) Make others feel accepted;
- (4) Be sensitive to their needs and concerns; and
- (5) Look for opportunities to tell them about Christ.

These principles are just as valid for us as they were for Paul.

Winning a race requires purpose and discipline. Paul uses this illustration to explain that the Christian life takes hard work, self-denial, and grueling preparation.

As Christians, we are running toward our heavenly reward. The essential disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship equip us to run with vigor and stamina.

Don't merely observe from the grandstand; don't just turn out to jog a couple of laps each morning. Train diligently—your spiritual progress depends upon it.

### **1 Tim. 2:5**

**For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus.**

We human beings are separated from God by sin, and only one person in the universe is our mediator and can stand between us and God and bring us together again—Jesus, who is both God and man. Jesus' sacrifice brought new life to all people.

Have you let him bring you to the Father?

Jesus gave his life as a ransom for our sin (Mark 10:45). A ransom was the price paid to release a slave from captivity. Jesus, our mediator, gave his life in exchange for ours. By his death, he paid our penalty for sin.

### **Acts 20:24**

But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.

We often feel that life is a failure unless we're getting a lot out of it: recognition, fun, money, and success. But Paul considered life worth *nothing* unless he used it for God's work.

What he put *into* life was far more important than what he got out. Which is more important to you—what you get out of life, or what you put into it?

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It is no wonder that Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived. God is looking for more men and women who focus on that one great task God has given them to do.

### **Galatians 6:9**

**So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.**

It is discouraging to continue to do right and receive no word of thanks or see no tangible results. But Paul challenged the Galatians and he challenges us to keep on doing good and to trust God for the results. In due time, we will reap a harvest of blessing.

### **Proverbs 3:1-3**

**My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart, for they will give you a long and satisfying life. Never let loyalty and kindness get away from you! Wear them like a necklace; write them deep within your heart.**

Love and faithfulness are important character qualities. Both involve actions as well as attitudes.

A loving person not only feels love; he or she also acts loyally and responsibly.

A faithful person not only believes the truth; he or she also works for justice for others.

Thoughts and words are not enough—our lives reveal whether we are truly loving and faithful. Do your actions measure up to your attitudes?

## Chapter 4



### Keep your eyes on Jesus

#### Hebrews 12:2

**We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven.**

The Christian life involves hard work. It requires us to give up whatever endangers our relationship with God, to run patiently, and to struggle against sin with the power of the Holy Spirit.

To live effectively, we must keep our eyes on Jesus. We will stumble if we look away from him to stare at ourselves or at the circumstances surrounding us.

We should be running for Christ, not ourselves, and we must always keep him in sight.

## **We are God's Masterpiece**

**Ephes. 2:10**

**We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**

We become Christians through God's unmerited grace, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or act of service on our part.

However, out of gratitude for this free gift, we will seek to help and serve others with kindness, love, and gentleness, and not merely to please ourselves.

While no action or work we do can help us obtain salvation, God's intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service. We are not saved merely for our own benefit but to serve Christ and build up the church (Ephes. 4:12).

We are God's workmanship (work of art, masterpiece). Our salvation is something only God can do. It is his powerful, creative work in us. If God considers us his works of art, we dare not treat ourselves or others with disrespect or as inferior work.

## **Romans 8:1-2**

**So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. The power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.**

Not guilty; let him go free”—what would those words mean to you if you were on death row?

The fact is that the whole human race *is* on death row, justly condemned for repeatedly breaking God’s holy law.

Without Jesus we would have no hope at all. But thank God! He has declared us not guilty and has offered us freedom from sin and power to do his will.

This Spirit of life is the Holy Spirit. He was present at the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2), and he is the power behind the rebirth of every Christian. He gives us the power we need to live the Christian life.

## **Do all for the sake of the gospel**

### **1 Cor. 9:23**

**I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings.**

Paul gives several important principles for ministry: (1) find common ground with those you contact; (2) avoid a know-it-all attitude; (3) make others feel accepted; (4) be sensitive to their needs and concerns; and (5) look for opportunities to tell them about Christ. These principles are just as valid for us as they were for Paul.

Psalm 1:1-6

**Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.**

**But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.**

**The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff that the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.**

**For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.**

The writer begins his psalm extolling the joys of obeying God and refusing to listen to those who discredit or ridicule him. Our friends and associates can have a profound influence on us, often in very subtle ways.

If we insist on friendships with those who mock what God considers important, we might sin by becoming indifferent to God's will. This attitude is the same as mocking. Do your friends build up your faith, or do they tear it down? True friends should help, not hinder, you to draw closer to God.

God doesn't judge people on the basis of race, sex, or national origin. He judges them on the basis of their faith in him and their response to his revealed will. Those who diligently try to obey God's will are blessed. Their happy condition is like healthy, fruit-bearing trees with strong roots (Jeremiah 17:5-8), and God promises to watch over them. God's wisdom guides their lives. In contrast, those who don't trust and obey God have meaningless lives that blow away like dust.

There are only two paths of life before us—God's way of obedience or the way of rebellion and destruction. Be sure to choose God's path because the path you choose determines how you will spend eternity.

You can learn how to follow God by meditating on his Word. Meditating means spending time reading and thinking about what you have read. It means asking yourself how you should change so you're living as God wants. Knowing and meditating on God's Word are the first steps toward applying it to your everyday life. If you want to follow God more closely, you must know what he says.

This "law of the LORD" means all of Scripture: the first five books of Moses, the Prophets, and the other writings. The more we know of the whole scope of God's Word, the more resources we will have to guide us in our daily decisions.

There is simple wisdom in these verses—the more we delight in God's presence, the more fruitful we are.

On the other hand, the more we allow those who ridicule God to affect our thoughts and attitudes, the more we separate ourselves from our source of nourishment.

We must have contact with unbelievers if we are to witness to them, but we must not join in or imitate their sinful behavior. If you want despair, spend time with mocking sinners; but if you want God's happiness, make friends with those who love God and his Word.

When Scripture says, "Whatever he does prospers," it does not mean immunity from failure or difficulties. Nor is it a guarantee of health, wealth, and happiness.

What the Bible means by prosperity is this: when we apply God's wisdom, the fruit (results or by-products) we bear will be good and receive God's approval. Just as a tree soaks up water and bears luscious fruit, we also are to soak up God's Word, producing actions and attitudes that honor God.

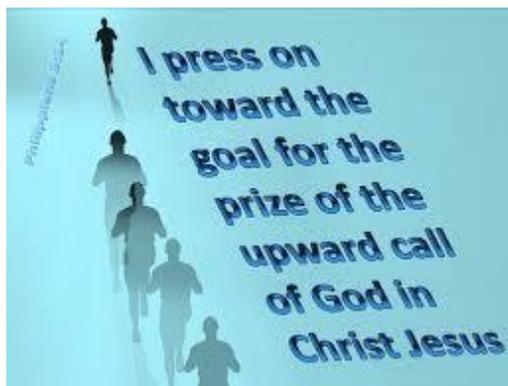
To achieve anything worthwhile, we must have God's Word in our hearts.

Chaff is the outer shell (or husk) that must be removed to get at the valuable kernels of grain inside. A process called threshing and winnowing removed chaff.

After the plants were cut, they were crushed, and then the pieces were thrown into the air. Chaff is very light and is carried away by even the slightest wind, while the good grain falls back to the earth.

Chaff is a symbol of a faithless life that drifts along without direction. Good grain is a symbol of a faithful life that can be used by God. Unlike grain, however, we can choose the direction we will take.

## Chapter 5



### Press on toward the goal

#### Philip. 3:12-13

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

Paul says that his goal is to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ has in mind for him. This goal absorbs all Paul's energy. This is a helpful example for us. We should not let anything take our eyes off our goal—knowing Christ. With the single-mindedness of an athlete in training, we must lay aside everything harmful and forsake anything that may distract us from being effective Christians. What is holding you back?

Paul had reason to forget what was behind—he had held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:57-58, Paul is called Saul here).

We have all done things for which we are ashamed, and we live in the tension of what we have been and what we want to be. Because our hope is in Christ, however, we can let go of past guilt and look forward to what God will help us become.

Don't dwell on your past. Instead, grow in the knowledge of God by concentrating on your relationship with him *now*. Realize that you are forgiven, and then move on to a life of faith and obedience.

Look forward to a fuller and more meaningful life because of your hope in Christ.

## **Romans 8:28**

**And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.**

God works in “all things”—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good.

God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose. Note also that this promise is not for everybody. It can be claimed only by those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Those who are “called” are those, the Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive

Christ. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set on life. They trust in God, not life's treasures; they look for their security in heaven, not on earth; they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution because God is with them.

## **Romans 11:29**

**For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.**

In this passage Paul shows how the Jews and the Gentiles benefit each other. Whenever God shows mercy to one group, the other shares the blessing.

In God's original plan, the Jews would be the source of God's blessing to the Gentiles (see Genesis 12:3). When the Jews neglected this mission, God blessed the Gentiles anyway through the Jewish Messiah.

He still maintained his love for the Jews because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ("on account of the patriarchs"). But someday the faithful Jews will share in God's mercy. God's plans will not be thwarted: he will "have mercy on them all." For a beautiful picture of Jews and Gentiles experiencing rich blessings, see Isaiah 60.

The privileges and invitation of God given to Israel can never be withdrawn.

## **2 Tim. 1:9**

It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus.

In these verses Paul gives a brief summary of the gospel. God loves us, called us, and sent Christ to die for us. We can have eternal life through faith in him, because he broke the power of death with his resurrection.

We do not deserve to be saved, but God offers us salvation anyway. What we must do is believe in him and accept his offer.

## **Romans 8:28-30**

**And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.**

**For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.**

**And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And he gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory.**

God works in “all things”—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good.

Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose.

Note also that this promise is not for everybody. Only those who love God and are called according to his purpose can claim it.

### **1 Thes. 2:12**

**We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you into his Kingdom to share his glory.**

This man of lawlessness with his power and miracles will deceive those who have refused to believe God's truth. God gives people freedom to turn their backs on him and believe Satan's lies. If they say no to the truth, they will experience the consequences of their sin.

### **1 Thes. 2:13-14**

**And we will never stop thanking God that when we preached his message to you, you didn't think of the words we spoke as being just our own. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it was. And this word continues to work in you who believe.**

**And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God's churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews.**

Paul consistently taught that salvation begins and ends with God. We can do nothing to be saved on our own merit—we must accept God's gift of salvation.

There is no other way to receive forgiveness from sin. Paul is encouraging the Thessalonian believers by reminding them that God chose them from the beginning. *Sanctification* is the process of Christian growth through which the Holy Spirit makes us like Christ (Romans 8:29).

## **2 Peter 1:3**

**As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness!**

The power to grow doesn't come from within us, but from God. Because we don't have the resources to be truly godly, God allows us to "participate in the divine nature" in order to keep us from sin and help us live for him. When we are born again, God by his Spirit empowers us with his own moral goodness.

## MY GOAL

By Harold Bollinger

OF ALL THE THINGS A MAN CAN DO  
WITH IDEAS BIG AND SMALL  
HE LOOKS WITHIN HIS NARROW VIEW  
UNTIL HE FINDS HIS PLACE WITH ALL.

HIS GOAL AT FIRST MAY SEEM QUITE SMALL  
AND POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE.  
BUT SOON HE LOOKS BEYOND HIS GOAL  
TO THINGS HARD TO BELIEVE.

HIS MIND MAY WONDER IN DISMAY  
HOW THESE COULD EVER BE.  
TOO HARD, TOO LONG FOR UNDEVELOPED SKILLS  
TO FIND A PLACE THAT HE CAN SEE.

UNLESS, OF COURSE, HIS HOPE TURNS SLOWLY INTO FAITH,  
AND FAITH TURNS SLOWLY INTO  
THINGS YET TO BE SEEN.

HIS CHALLENGE SEEMS TO GRASP AND GROW  
WITH NEW FOUND FAITH THAT CAN BE SEEN.  
FOR SOON A DREAM BECOMES A GOAL.  
THE GOAL BECOMES A THING TO HELP AND HEAL

DARE WE DREAM OF THINGS UNSEEN,  
OF THINGS BEYOND OUR GRASP.  
WE SEE A NEED, WE HEAR A CALL.  
FROM THOSE WITH LITTLE HOPE.

IT IS THEN THE IDEAS BECOME A DREAM.  
THE DREAM BECOMES OUR GOAL.  
THE NEED IS MET, THE GOAL ACHIEVED.  
THE UNKNOWN IS NOW MADE KNOWN.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation  
Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

Additional comments and charts are taken from:

*Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

