

Walk by Faith Not Sight (Or No Longer Blind?)

by Tricia Berg

*So **we do not lose heart.** Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.** For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. **So we are always of good courage.** We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for **we walk by faith, not by sight.** Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, **we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.** 2 Corinthians 4:16-10*

We all know that verse by heart about walking by faith, not sight, don't we? As is usually the case, it is interesting what you notice when you look at the context. I included the last few verses of the previous chapter because it adds a lot to the understanding. The reference to being of good courage takes us back to God's words to Joshua when he was just about to take the Israelites into the promised land and drive out giants (and also Moses, but the people refused to go in out of fear and unbelief that God, who had just rescued them from the Egyptians, could protect them). If ever courage, strength and power from God were needed, that was one of those times! (Joshua 1) I think we can all agree that the early disciples needed a lot of courage and strength from God, as do the many persecuted Christians throughout the world today.

These days, it seems like some people think that "walking by faith not sight" is trusting that even though it doesn't *look like* God's doing what they want Him to, He actually will *eventually* and just to have faith in that. People like to combine it with another verse, "knock and the door will be opened" (Mat. 7:7-11). However, the teaching from Matthew is surrounded with "seek first the

kingdom of God" and "God already knows what we need" from Matt. 6 and "enter through the narrow door," "not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom," "beware of false prophets," and "do what Jesus says after you hear His words" later in Matt. 7. So obviously God wouldn't tell us not to worry even about food and clothing, and about what will happen tomorrow, but rather to seek FIRST to please and serve Him, and then turn around and encourage us to boldly "claim" whatever we think we need (or just want) from Him and it's ours.

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore **do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**" Matthew 6:20-34**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will **guard your hearts and your minds** in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4-7**

People like to support their preferred spin on the "ask, knock and receive" with the parable of the persistent widow. There is nothing wrong with trusting God, of course. The problem is when we want to "name and claim" "promises" out of context. As we can see by the widow illustration given by Jesus, the woman is seeking JUSTICE. She has done nothing wrong, but is suffering due to the misdeeds of someone else. She is not taking matters into her own hands, but is being persistent in pursuing justice through the proper channels.

*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. **And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.** Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-8*

When David was going to avenge himself on Nabal, He thanked Abigail that God used her to stop him. (1Sam. 25) David later restrained one of his men from taking vengeance on his behalf, similar to when Jesus later healed the ear of the servant in the Garden of Gethsemane. (2Sam. 16:5-14, Luke 22:47-53, Matt. 26:51-52) OUR judge is God, who is a FAIR judge who will not ignore our requests for His intervention according to His PERFECT will. We should pray faithfully and wait upon His answer, knowing He hears us and loves us, keeping in mind that He knows better than we do what we need and what is the best way to handle our problem.

*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.** Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. **Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:9-21*

Another favorite Bible verse for people to quote as proof that God will give them what they want is "believe you have what you ask or you won't receive it." That context is very interesting, since what is being asked for is WISDOM—but people who are fascinated with *things* don't even think to consult God for advice (or if

they do, they want it NOW—"Quick, God, should I buy this? Unless you give me a clear sign, I'll assume the answer is 'yes'"). The passage again includes the exhortation to endure suffering, which is for our good when we consider what our end goal is.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you **face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.** James 1:2-8*

Jesus told the disciples if they had faith without doubting, they would receive what they asked for. The examples given were not about getting just anything we want, but the kinds of things we might need and ask for if we were fighting giants like David and Joshua. David declined the offer to wear King Saul's armor, but went into battle trusting ONLY in God. (1Sam. 17) We are protected from attacks *from without* (and from within) when we have on the full armor of God—the battle is HIS.

*In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you." They didn't seem to realize that if you get the inside clean, the outside will be cleansed along with it. They didn't know Jesus could see right into their wicked hearts! (Matt. 9:4) They actually thought He should be impressed with their righteous acts. (Matt. 23) *ou again!" And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, **if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.**" Matthew 21:18-22**

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who

shall separate us from the love of Christ? **Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Romans 8:31-39

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.** James 4:7-10

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will **fearlessly** make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it **fearlessly**, as I should. Ephesians 6:10-20

If the answer is "no" when we ask for something, we should be just as grateful as when it is "yes." In His great love for us, God is sparing us from having our own way when we don't actually know what is best—but He knows it ALL from beginning to end. Even when there is death, that can be a blessing compared to what would have been, which only He knows. (Isaiah 57:1-2) We have to believe and remember always that He is GOOD, no matter what happens.

(Psalm 111:10) I personally believe that Psalm 101 is partially prophetic, just as many portions of the Psalms are—in this case, about the millennial (and also eternal) kingdom. (Luke 24:27, Luke 24:44, Ezek. 44, Isaiah 65:20, Isaiah 66:18-24, Rev. 21:22-27, Rev. 22:14-15)

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! **For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.** 101:1 I will sing of **steadfast love and justice**; to you, O LORD, I will make music. I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? **I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil.** Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure. I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; **he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me. No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.** Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked in the land, cutting off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD. Psalm 100:1-101:8*

Another verse people LOVE is “God works all things out for our good,” so let’s look at that in context as well. The first thing that pops out is that this passage concerns God’s children (who love Him) and that suffering for Jesus’ sake is to be expected prior to sharing His glory. His children have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, who knows the mind of God so that the requests of His children can be made in accordance with His will. (1Cor. 2:10-16) That doesn’t mean we won’t ever ask for something we shouldn’t, but the more we are walking in the Spirit, the more likely it will be that we want the same things God wants. The very most important thing “for our good” that all of us should be seeking is to be good and faithful servants—such that God receives glory from our lives, and we receive an inheritance in heaven that will last forever. This involves suffering, since our faith must be tested and proven genuine, even during temptation or persecution.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may

also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. **For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because **the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.** And we know that **in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**
Romans 8:16-28

Our treasure is in heaven, and that includes the crown of righteousness that Paul said we should all fight the good fight and run the good race to pursue as a prize. Jesus cautioned even the faithful Church at Philadelphia not to let anyone take theirs! Wow. So like it says above, we hope for these rewards but we haven't received them yet. We need to be steadfast until the end to actually come into our inheritance.

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing.* 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Because you have kept my word about **patient endurance**, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. **Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.** The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ Revelation 3:10-13

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has **stood the test** he will receive the **crown of life**, which God has **promised to those who love him**. James 1:12

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you **endured a hard struggle with sufferings**, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a **better possession and an abiding one**. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. **For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.** For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall **live by faith**, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have **faith** and preserve their souls. Hebrews 10:32-39

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. **Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.** Hebrews 6:4-12

So since our highest priority is to glorify God with these short lives of ours, and our reward is kept in heaven for us, that is the kind of “walking by faith not sight” we need to be doing. Those are the kind of requests we will make in our prayers—the kind that help us reach the goal—the kind that will result in more grateful souls praising our King for all eternity. Paul is trying to help us understand that this is ALL that matters and that Jesus is worth ANY cost.

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, **the righteousness from God that depends on faith**—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but **I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own**. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.** Philipians 3:7-21*

When Paul says He wants to be found IN Jesus, He ALREADY believes, and is certainly not planning to turn back. (Luke 9:62) He is talking about persevering despite severe persecution, abiding in Jesus and bearing fruit, being a faithful overcomer to the end, like Jesus told us to do. Jesus said again that whatever we ask will be given to us. He is talking to believers in whom His Spirit will be dwelling. He knows they will be asking for what is important to His mission, which is also OUR mission—to save the lost. (Luke 19:10, Jam. 4:1-5) His disciples already trust Him to provide the food and clothing with which Paul later tells us to be content. They pray for tools to reach souls, for strength, for opportunities, etc. They are more concerned about how many souls will be lost

if everyone just goes along with the flow than with being called "haters" on social media for standing up for the truth in this wicked culture. They know that telling people lies they want to hear won't benefit them. SALT is needed to cure the infection and preserve what is left of society from destruction. (John 3:36, Rom. 1:18-32, Eph. 5:1-21, Col. 3:5-17, Jude 1:14-15, Rev. 14:17-19, Rev. 19:11-21)

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that **bears much fruit**, for apart from me you can do nothing. **If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.** As the Father has loved me, so have I 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.** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and **that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and **bear fruit** and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another. **If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.** Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.
John 15:1-21*

Paul also gives us a warning against "health and wealth" preachers as well as others who tell people what they like to hear in order to get rich and famous.

*If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the **sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ** and the **teaching that accords with godliness**, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. **But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith** and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. **Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession** in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:3-12*

For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. 2 Corinthians 2:17 (Also Jude 1:11)

Paul would like us all to grasp the parables Jesus told. Does it sound like entry into the kingdom is free? It sounds to me like it costs your LIFE. Even if not everyone is called to die for Jesus' sake, everyone is called to be willing to do so. Even if our lives are not literally in danger, we still consider NO ONE and NOTHING in this world to be more dear to us than God. That is THE greatest commandment. (Mark 12:28-34)

*Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. **The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom**. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. **The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place***

there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.** He who has ears, let him hear. The **kingdom of heaven** is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and **sells all that he has and buys that field.** Again, the **kingdom of heaven** is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, **went and sold all that he had and bought it.**" Matthew 13:36-46

So therefore, any one of you who does not **renounce all that he has** cannot be my disciple. "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is **of no use** either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is **thrown away.** He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Luke 14:33-35

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is **not worthy of me,** and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is **not worthy of me.** And whoever does not **take his cross and follow me** is **not worthy of me.** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life **for my sake** will find it. Matthew 10:37-39

And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are **considered worthy to attain to that age** and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they **cannot die anymore,** because they are equal to angels and are **sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.** Luke 20:34-36

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, **who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.** Romans 8:18-23

The question is how do we get from where we are, where God is not in His proper place and we value worthless things (because that is the way it is in this present world), to where we need to be, where He is our all in all (as He should be) and we invest in eternal treasure? I believe the answer is to immerse ourselves in our Bibles, to really consider and appreciate the miracle of all that God has made and done, which is how get to KNOW Him as He is—where He revealed Himself to us. To truly know Him is to utterly LOVE Him. We can love strangers on a sacrificial level (as we were told to do, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to do), but the intimate relationship of family is the pattern God gave us for our relationship with Him. We have examples of spouse, brother, close friend and parent to draw on in our interaction with Him. (Eph. 5:25-33, 1Cor. 6:12-20, 2Cor. 11:1-4, Rom. 8:13-17, Gal. 4:6-7, Heb. 2:10-18, John 15:15)

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Matthew 6:19-24

*And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, **seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be***

ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Luke 12:29-40

There was an episode of the original Star Trek series where an alien woman shed a tear on Captain Kirk, causing him to fall madly in love with her. Dr. McCoy eventually found what he believed was an antidote to cure the condition, but it wasn't needed. The Captain had already returned his affections to his first love, the Enterprise. As Christians, we need to have this attitude toward God. We will then be immune to the enticements of the world to stray from Him and put our faith, values and priorities in worthless things that do not last.

For Demas, **in love with this present world, has deserted me** and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:10

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

*"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that **you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.** Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'"* Revelation 2:1-7

When we sing the line from the hymn Amazing Grace: "I once as blind but now I see," do we really mean it? I think we mostly mean that we see there is no way to be saved except through Jesus, and that is absolutely true, but how good is our vision if we don't know our Bibles so that we can live in the manner that the Lord who saved us wants us to? (Eph. 4:1-2, Philip. 1:27, 1Thess. 2:11-12)

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be **filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Colossians 1:9-12**

Jesus is our Master (Lord) and Teacher. (Matt. 23:8-12) He came to set us free FROM sin—both the penalty of eternal spiritual death for it AND the enslavement to it in this physical life. We have no better *vision* than the Pharisees if we think saying some words about faith and attending church has cleaned us up—because it looks to *others* as though we are “good” by doing those things. Our fruits will reveal us to be liars, because if we are still filthy on the inside, our evil intentions and thoughts will work themselves out into our words and actions. The Pharisees thought that washing the outside of the cup was more important than the inside. They didn’t seem to realize that if you get the inside clean, the outside will be cleansed along with it. They didn’t know Jesus could see right into their wicked hearts! (Matt. 9:4) They actually thought He should be impressed with their righteous acts. (Matt. 23)

*He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. **For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.** But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” Matthew 15:13-20*

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! **First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.**” Matthew 23:25-26*

John warned us that those who are born again will no longer love sin. The two don’t go together. A person who still loves sin (as in, living IN it without trying to resist it, without repenting of it) is LYING if they claim to be born again. No

one will enter the kingdom UNLESS they are born again of the Holy Spirit. (John 3:3-8, Rom. 8:9)

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you **may not sin.** But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And **by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,** but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 1:5-2:6***

I am NOT saying we need to clean ourselves up before we come to Jesus. I am saying that IF we have truly come to Him, then there will be progress toward the outside matching the inside IF we truly do believe. (Jude 1:20-21) It is actually impossible for us to even desire to be clean, let alone clean ourselves, without the Father drawing us to Him. (Rom. 8:1-17, especially vv. 7-8, John 6:44, John 6:65, John 14:6)

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has **granted to us his precious and very great promises,** so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, **having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.** For this very reason, **make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed**

from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. 2 Peter 1:3-15

When God said our deeds are filthy rags, He meant because they are only outward shows, trying to impress Him and others, instead of stemming from a clean heart and a pure conscience within us. (Isaiah 64:5-9, Hosea 6:6, Matt. 9:13) Unless He cleanses us, we are NOT clean. (Psalm 51:7) Once we are clean, **He transforms** us from the inside out to be like Him and useful to Him. (Rom. 8:29, John 15:8, Matt. 13:23, 2Tim. 2:19-26) Unless we cooperate with Him, we will not STAY clean. (Rev. 3:4, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19) Thankfully, there is mercy and grace for those who slip or sin in ignorance, once they know better and repent, asking Jesus to forgive and cleanse them anew with the blood of His ONE perfect sacrifice. (1John 1:5-2:6, Heb. 9:24-28, Luke 12:47-48) Jesus explained that the washing of the feet after the Lord's Supper represented washing the filth of the world off of those who are already washed (saved). (John 13:1-17) It is also similar to pruning unfruitful branches. (John 15:1-3) All of it is God's work, but we are His faithful servants who yield to Him and do His will rather than striving against Him.

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water** [of the word - see Eph. 5:25-27, John 15:3, John 6:63]. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to **stir up one another to love and good works**, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **How much worse***

punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:19-31

Works don't save us, but they are expected of those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, because it is HE who produces them. The "good works" are not only "good deeds," but an entire LIFE that glorifies God. (Heb. 12:28-29, Rom. 12:1-2) If our *vision is clear*, can we still think that God "understands" why we love our sin more than Him? (because He said IF we love Him, we will OBEY Him. John 14:15-24)

"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." Luke 11:34-36

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. James 1:13-16

Does the glare of "all that glistens" get in our eyes so that we can't recognize that the earthly stuff we used to value is like garbage compare to heavenly things? (Col. 3) Wouldn't someone who now has sight SEE how glorious and worthy our great and wonderful God is? How is that walking by faith not sight if we compromise morals, grumble, and idolize celebrities along with everyone else who is NOT saved? (Phil. 2:14-16, Matt. 5:10-16)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your

spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Jesus explained in John 14:15-24 that His Father would love the one who loves Him (by obeying, not to earn salvation, but out of LOVE for Him), and THEY are the ones who would be indwelt by the Helper (the Spirit of Truth, the Teacher). Whoever does not love Him will *not obey*, and will *not be indwelt*. This explains a lot about the behavior of many who claim to believe but don't act like they know God sees what they do, or that He is all powerful, all knowing. (John 3:3-8, 1John 3:9, 1John 5:18, 1Cor. 3:16-20, Psalm 94:8-10, Rev. 2:23, 1Chron. 28:9) There is a HUGE difference between saying we believe in order to get a "get out of jail free card" and being willing to suffer persecution for Jesus' sake. Needless to say, if we're not even willing to give up our lifestyle of sin for Him, then suffering for His sake is out of the question. (Acts 5:40-41, Jam. 1:2-4, Heb. 10:32-36)

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Philippians 1:27-30

Walking by faith helps us to remember that our faith is purified and refined by going through trials and tribulations rather than giving up and renouncing Jesus. (Matt. 10:31-33, Luke 12:8-9, 2Tim 2:10-13) Some of those *tests* can be things we think of as good—money, fame, etc. and some bad—illness, death of loved ones, etc. Look how Job was tested! He lost everything—possessions, family, health—and still endured. (1Cor. 10:12-13, Jam. 1:12-16)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in

*the last time. **In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him.** Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, **obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.** 1 Peter 1:3-9*

*Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the **steadfastness of Job**, and you have seen the **purpose of the Lord**, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. James 5:11*

*But he knows the way that I take; **when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.** Job 23:10*

***Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.** Isaiah 48:10*

After introducing the Helper in chapter 14 of John, Jesus went on in chapter 15 (all of this was to His disciples after the Lord's Supper and prior to His betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane) to explain that the Father desires the disciples of His Son to bear fruit (of His indwelling Spirit, His "seed" - God teaches us through many different kinds of examples, one of which is farming) for His glory. (1John 3:9, Jam. 5:7-8, Luke 10:2) He told the disciples that He was telling them the things in that discussion "so that they may have His joy, and their joy may be full." In the parable of the returning master, He taught that the faithful servant would be invited to "enter the joy of his master." (Matt. 25:14-30, Rev. 19:9) Wow. Do you think this might hold a clue as to HOW the servant was faithful and earned such praise from his master by what Jesus told the disciples in chapters 14 and 15 of John? John 14 tells how we acquire the power (by the Holy Spirit), and John 15 tells us how we can ONLY work it OUT (bear fruit) by ABIDING in Him. (Philip. 2:12-13)

Jesus even goes so far as to connect the laying down of a life for friends with *His friends* doing what He commands. (John 15:12-17, John 10:15-18) Don't worry—this is not trying to keep the Law of the Old Covenant, but to obey His commands to love God first and then your neighbor, because that will fulfill all of the commandments. Jesus said that the one who understood this was "not far from the kingdom." It is the "royal law" and the "law of liberty" and the "golden rule" all rolled into one. (Mark 12:28-34, Jam. 2:8-12, Jam. 1:25, Matt. 7:12-29) We do not harm our neighbor, even by causing them to sin by our

actions or even our approval of their sin. (Gal. 6:1, 1Thess. 4:2-8, Jam. 5:19-20, Rom. 1:32) We love in word AND deed. (1John 3:16-18, Jam. 2:14-17) We have no idols of money, celebrities, pleasure, etc. This is a HIGHER calling than the old Law. Jesus knows our very thoughts and hearts—if we THINK murderous or adulterous thoughts, we are a murderer or adulterer and so on. (Matt. 5:21-24, Matt. 5:27-28) But we don't obey out of fear or even by our own power. We do so out of love and by the power of the Holy Spirit. (1John 4:18)

*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. **If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are **trying to deceive you**. But the anointing that you received from him [Holy Spirit] abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. **And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.** 1 John 2:24-29*

Never at any time did the Gospel include a license to sin deliberately. On the contrary, it has ALWAYS been presented as a NEW way of life. (Rom. 6, Rom. 3:8)

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, ***live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear***. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that ***you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors***, but with the ***precious blood of Christ***, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And ***this is the word that was preached to you***. 1 Peter 1:14-25

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. **Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.** 1 John 3:16-22 (See also John 15:10, John 15:13-14.)

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. 1 John 3:24

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses* that Jesus is the Son of God, **God abides in him, and he in God.** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and **whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 1 John 4:13-17

*The "confession" above agrees with Rom. 10:8-10—we confess with our mouths AND believe in our HEARTS that Jesus is BOTH Lord AND Savior. These is not mere empty words! If they were, then that would disagree with the rest of 1 John. I believe that "as He is also are we in this world" refers to how He was hated (John 15:18-27, Matt. 10:40, John 13:20) as well as our displaying His love to the world. (John 13:34-35) We can expect to be hated without cause and persecuted because the world does not want its sins disapproved of by anyone, but we must not let our love grow cold. (Matt. 24:12-14) Whoever belongs to God listens to Him and those He sends, and whoever belongs to the devil doesn't. (Luke 10:16) It is necessary to ABIDE if we don't want to be cut off and thrown out, just as we were told to "cut off" whatever part of our body that causes us to sin. (Matt. 5:27-30)

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as**

he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. **By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.** For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 1 John 3:4-15

The letters to the Churches in Rev. 2-3, as dictated by the angel of Jesus to John (Rev. 1:1-3), ALL emphasize the necessity of holding fast and enduring to the end. People who LOVE Jesus don't *trample on His precious blood that cleansed them and outrage the Holy Spirit who sanctified them.* (Heb. 10:26-30) They refrain from implicating Him in the filth of the sins they USED to live in—because He DWELLS IN true believers.

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?** For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. **Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.** 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others

and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. **The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.** Titus 3:3-8

For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." 2 Peter 2:18-22

We were all given free will by God as a gift. He doesn't want robots who are programmed to do what their Creator wants them to do. He desires and deserves REAL devotion from His children whom He adopted as His own. (John 1:12-13) How sad would that be if we as parents had children who didn't love us despite all they have done for them. Some parents do have children like that, and it's very heart-wrenching. Many have had children who only wanted stuff and pretended to love their parents in order to get it. That is a sign of the times we live in.

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. **For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*** 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Faith is a gift, but we choose whether to accept it or not, and we choose what to do with it once we have accepted the gift of salvation that was offered to us.

(Eph. 2:8-10, 1Tim. 2:1-7, 2Pet. 3:9) We can do nothing to earn, deserve or repay Jesus for His gift to us of eternal life. However, there are rewards are given in the next life according to the way we exercised the measure of faith we received from our Lord and Master in this one. (Luke 17:5, Luke 11:12-13) The rewards were promised to those who LOVE Jesus (1Cor. 2:6-10), and that is determined by how we SHOW it. "God knows what's in our hearts" and so do those around us based on what works its way out from inside of us. (Matt. 15:19, Matt. 7:15-20) Are we lukewarm or on fire for God? (Rev. 3:14-22)

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the **measure of faith** that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. **Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.***
Romans 12:3-8

Whoever says that everyone receives the same reward in eternity is confusing salvation with rewards. The vineyard workers (also see Matt. 9:35-38) who reported for work (symbolizing that they believed and accepted the master's offer, and followed through on it by showing up, unlike the "bad" son in Matt. 21:28-32 who SAID he would work, but didn't). Some workers didn't receive and accept the offer early in the day as others did, so they only "worked" for a short time—like the thief on the cross (even he has a testimony that everyone who reads the Bible hears). However, all were "paid" the same (salvation). (Matt. 20:1-16) The thief on the cross acknowledged Jesus as Lord by asking to be remembered when He came into His kingdom. Only the Holy Spirit can impart that faith (but we must humble ourselves and receive it - 1Cor. 1:18-31, 1Cor. 3:18-20, Jam. 2:5, Matt. 11:25-26), and the other thief apparently did not accept and receive that gift before he died a short time later. So far as we know, he died in unbelief, still in his sins. (John 8:24) That is one of the saddest things ever, to have that last minute chance and the example of the other thief, and to pass it by.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man

*has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me **when you come into your kingdom.**” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Luke 23:39-43*

Will the thief on the cross (who suffered for his own sins) be given the exact same reward as someone like Stephen, who was stoned to death because of his testimony about Christ, or any of the apostles who died for the same reason? I don't think so, but he will be happy not to perish, nevertheless. Jesus told a parable in Matt. 25:14-30 about servants whose Lord gave them talents (gifts of the Spirit - 1Cor. 12-14) before leaving and returning were rewarded according to how they used their gifts to their Lord's profit (His glory and increase in "harvest" of souls). We are not rewarded for suffering due to our own misdeeds.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but **continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:19-25

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the **fiery trial** when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But **rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is **time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:12-19***

The servant in the parable who "hid his light under a bushel" (who didn't trust in the good and just nature of his Lord), had his talent (gifts of the Spirit originally given to him) given to someone else who already had more than he did, but who used what he had been given to the utmost. This MATTERS and we WILL care if this happens to US. It's not as bad as hearing "I don't know you" or "I never knew you," but how could it be anything else than humiliating and heartbreaking to stand before the One who gave His LIFE for us and have it revealed to EVERYONE the LACK OF LOVE that we had for Him in return? (Luke 8:4-18) To see our "works" burned up because we loved the same things unsaved people do and feared the same things those who have no trust in God fear?

*According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.** 1 Corinthians 3:10-15*

*If in Christ we have **hope in this life only**, we are of all people most to be **pitied**. 1 Corinthians 15:19*

Jesus told his disciples that whoever gives up everything to serve Him will be rewarded in the next life many times over. It's interesting how He said "hundredfold," just as He did in the Parable of the Sower for the seed sown in good soil, isn't it? It's also interesting how the uselessness of pursuing riches when seeking the kingdom of God is once more pointed out.

*And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit 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 lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. Matthew 19:23-30

"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on **good soil**, this is the one who **hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields**, in one case a **hundredfold**, in another sixty, and in another thirty." Matthew 13:18-23

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.** 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

In the examples of the profitable servants who invested their talents while their master was away (sound familiar?), there were varying rewards for varying levels of fruitfulness. We who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit have been given various gifts with which we serve our Lord and King, using them to build up the Body of Christ. (1Cor. 14:12, Eph. 4:11-16)

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. **Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.** And he who had received the five

talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" Matthew 25:14-30

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

God said that because of His great patience and mercy, foolish people start to thinking as though He's like them. They think that just because He doesn't immediately punish infractions, that He now "doesn't see" our sin or doesn't mind it. (See Acts 5:1-11, Acts 17:30-31, Rom. 3:23-26) He also told us that He sends rain on the both the good and the wicked, and He only disciplines HIS OWN children. He tolerates vessels of wrath patiently until their time comes to be destroyed. He even uses them for His own purposes of refining and purifying His own people. He told us how to be a worthy vessel for service in His household. We must cleanse ourselves of the filth of this world. (2Pet. 2:19-22,

1Cor. 15:33-34, Jam. 1:27, 1John 2:15, Jam. 4:4) We are to be holy because He is holy and we are His temple. (1Cor. 3:16-17) We are to HOLD FAST, even if His return appears to be DELAYED. (Luke 12:41-48, 2Pet. 3)

*"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." **But to the wicked person, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You sit and testify against your brother and slander your own mother's son. When you did these things and I kept silent, you thought I was exactly like you. But I now arraign you and set my accusations before you. Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with no one to rescue you: Those who sacrifice thank offerings honor me, and to the blameless I will show my salvation."** Psalm 50:14-23*

O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve! O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? **They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast.** They crush your people, O LORD, and afflict your heritage. They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive." Understand, O dullest of the people! Fools, when will you be wise? **He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke? He who teaches man knowledge—the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath. Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.** For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage; for **justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.** Psalm 94:1-15

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? **What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the**

Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Romans 9:20-26

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**" Matthew 5:43-48

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. **For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. **Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like**

Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:1-29

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us **how you ought to walk and to please God**, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. **For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.** Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may **walk properly before outsiders** and be dependent on no one. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord shun unrighteousness." Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.
2 Timothy 2:19-26

The Bible has PLENTY of advice for believers who want to please their Lord and Savior. (Anyone who claims to believe yet has no such desire needs to examine themselves. Rom. 8:9, 2Cor. 13:5, Philip. 2:12-13, Gal. 5:16-25) I have compiled a list so that we can have some guidance to easily refer to if we truly do wish to be good and faithful servants. Just remember, NONE of these things will save anyone. Jesus ALONE saves, and we obey Him because He is our Lord. He first loved us by laying down His life for us. We love Him because of that—our eyes are OPEN. We now SEE how great, glorious and worthy He is of ALL of our devotion and praise. We were blind, but now we see. We can now see which way to walk by using our eyes of FAITH. (Psalm 119:105, Psalm 111:10, Jer. 6:16, Prov. 14:11-12)

This link will take you to my article "All Fall Short," which has an extensive list of encouraged and discouraged behaviors for believers in the second half:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bx44W_xQvLzoY0hOUTRGS0xyUTQ/view?usp=sharing

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