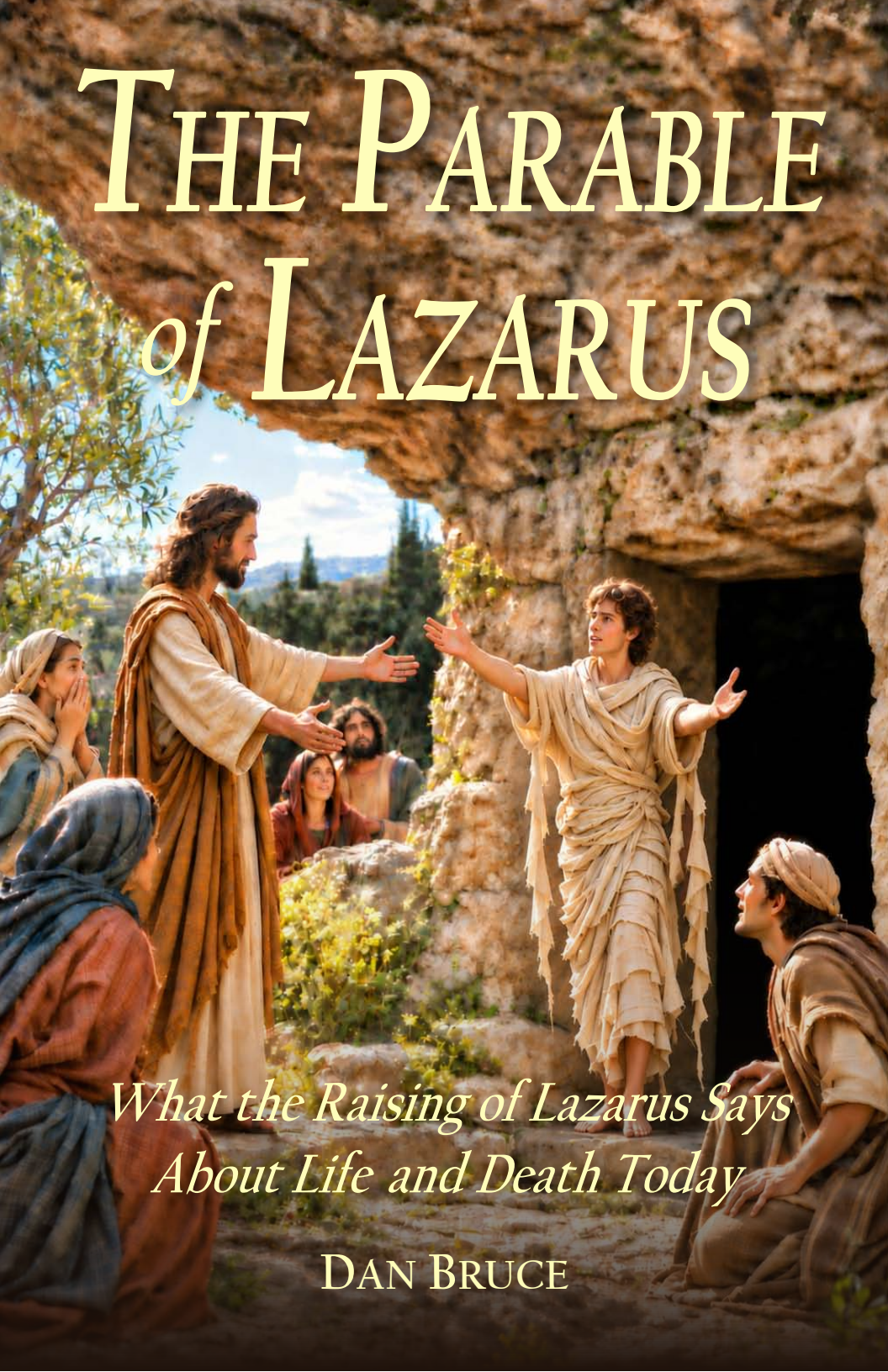
The Parable of Lazarus



What the Raising of Lazarus Says About Life and Death Today

Dan Bruce

The Parable of Lazarus

What the Raising of Lazarus Says About Life and Death Today

Dan Bruce

The Prophecy Society

Atlanta

THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS
COPYRIGHT © 2026 DAN BRUCE
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No content from this book may be reprinted, reproduced, or made available in any form by electronic, mechanical, or other means now known or hereafter invented, including scanning, photocopying, audio and video recording, information storage and retrieval systems, and the world wide web/internet, without permission from the author.

The source texts used for this book are: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Leningrad Codex, 4th edition; 1998) and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed., 1979; corrected, 1981; Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., both published by Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society). All Scripture quotations in English are from the New King James Version unless noted otherwise. The editions quoted in this book are available for reference online at Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com). Portions of this book are adapted from my earlier books, *After This, the Judgment* and *The Test.*

Disclaimer: Nothing you read in this book about what the Bible says can take the place of reading the Bible for yourself.

The Prophecy Society
www.prophecysociety.org
770-922-1889
Monday-Saturday 10am-8pm
Sunday after 2pm (Eastern Time)



Questions and comments ...
danbruce.usa@hotmail.com

Contents

Lazarus, Come Forth! 1

The Temporal World 3

The Spiritual World 7

Living in Both Worlds 11

Redeeming the Time 15

Commanded to Love 19

The Gift of Free Will 23

God Loved Us First 27

The Certainty of Death 31

The Ultimate Choice 35

Walking in the Spirit 39

Refined into Gold 43

Crowned in Glory 47

Come, Lord Jesus! 51

I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU

LIFE AND DEATH,

THEREFORE, CHOOSE LIFE.

Deuteronomy 30:19

Lazarus, Come Forth!

Jesus spoke just three words, and then Lazarus came out of his tomb alive (John 11:43–44). The Bible tells us nothing more about Lazarus's experience and records no teaching from him about that event. Instead, our attention is directed to what Jesus did.

The raising of Lazarus of Bethany was a real historical event that also functions in Scripture as one of Jesus' most important parables. Most people think of parables only as word stories that Jesus used to teach the people. Yet Jesus himself said: "*. . . all things come in parables, so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand*," indicating that some parables were enacted, with their message conveyed through what people saw (Mark 4:11–12).

Jesus communicated through both his words and deeds, as many of the prophets had done when they acted out their messages: Isaiah walked barefoot as a sign, Jeremiah broke a pot, and Ezekiel performed symbolic acts (Isaiah 20; Jeremiah 19; Ezekiel 4). Likewise, Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, his walking on water, his healings of the blind, and his final meal with his disciples were enacted parables that carried meaning beyond the actions themselves.

The parable of Lazarus is the starting point for the message of this book. When Lazarus became ill, Jesus did not go to him. He knew that Lazarus must die first. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. His sister Martha was aggrieved that Jesus had not been there to prevent Lazarus' death. Jesus responded to her rebuke by declaring, "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (John 11:25). To demonstrate that he had authority over life and death, Jesus called Lazarus out of his tomb. Lazarus' return to mortal life was a preview of the everlasting life Christ promises to all who believe in him.

The parable of Lazarus also draws our attention to the two worlds in which we live. We inhabit the visible, temporal world of days, work, family, and physical life. Scripture also speaks of an unseen spiritual reality. The raising of Lazarus connects these worlds: it took place in history, yet it revealed a truth about God's power and the promise of resurrection to life after death. Our days unfold in the temporal world, but their meaning reaches into eternity.

Scripture presents love for God as life's central purpose and the choice to love him—or not—as the most important decision we face during this lifetime. Jesus said we are to love God "*with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37). But God does not compel that love; each person remains free to choose during his or her lifetime. After death, however, each of us will have to answer to God for our response to him. Did we seek to live in obedience and fellowship, looking toward the eternal? Or did we give our deepest allegiance to the things of the world that cannot last? What we decide in our hearts is easy for God to see, since our daily priorities and decisions reveal whether our love for God is genuine.

Yet important as choosing to love God is, that choice does not earn our salvation. We love him because he first loved us. Before we ever sinned, God made provision for forgiveness through Christ, who gave his life to atone for our transgressions and iniquity: "*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). His act of love, not anything we do, redeems us when we receive the salvation freely offered by his grace.

The raising of Lazarus presents existential questions inherent in the event—questions about life, death, our choices about God, and what lies beyond this lifetime. Scripture addresses these questions and shows that the choices we make in daily life have eternal significance. Our study begins with what the Bible says about the temporal world in which our choices are made.

The Temporal World

When we wake each morning, time once again shapes our daily lives. We glance at the clock, measure the day by scheduled appointments, and mark our progress through seasons and years. Time sets the rhythm of our existence, yet Scripture tells us it is more than a neutral backdrop. Our days are a gift from God, bounded by his will and lived within his purposes. The temporal world is where we make choices that reveal our response to him.

The psalmist prayed, "*So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12). That prayer sets the foundation for understanding time. Our days are numbered, not limitless. Life in this world is short, fragile, and moving toward its end. The apostle James echoes this truth: "*For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*" (James 4:14).

We often treat time as though it will stretch endlessly, but Scripture reminds us that each passing moment is unique and unrecoverable. The temporal world is marked by beginnings and endings: sunrise and sunset, youth and old age, birth and death. These boundaries remind us that time is finite. To ignore this perspective is to drift through life as though it has no purpose; to embrace it is to begin walking toward wisdom.

Consider an hourglass. As sand slips from the top to the bottom, not one grain can be reclaimed. Our hours and days flow in the same way. We can waste them, invest them, or redeem them, but we cannot retrieve them. Time, once spent, is gone forever. That reality should awaken us to the significance of how we live.

Job lamented the brevity of human life with these sobering words: "*Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes*

forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue" (Job 14:1–2). Flowers bloom briefly, shadows lengthen and vanish—such is the nature of our earthly years.

Life unfolds in seasons—childhood, adulthood, middle age, and old age—each bringing opportunities and challenges. None lasts forever. They pass in succession, reminding us that our earthly lives are temporary. King Solomon reinforced that point: "*To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2).

The brevity of life is meant to awaken us. Recognizing that time is short helps us live with urgency and focus. If our days were endless, procrastination would be natural and daily activities might seem inconsequential. Because life is brief, every day matters. Time gives us the setting in which to make choices of faith, love, and obedience.

Consider the Children of Israel's years in the wilderness. For forty years, the people lived beneath the desert sun. Manna fell in the morning, tents were pitched and struck, and water was sought in barren places. To a casual observer, those years may have seemed wasted. Yet God said otherwise: "*The Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart*" (Deuteronomy 8:2). For the Israelites, the wilderness years were an appointed period of testing that exposed what was in the people's hearts and taught them to depend on God.

Our circumstances differ, yet our ordinary days also give us choices through which our trust and loyalties become visible. Work, family responsibilities, and daily tasks may seem routine, but the way we meet them matters. Paul told the philosophers in Athens that God "*has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings*" (Acts 17:26). Our place in history and geography is not accidental; our lives unfold under God's providence and within his purposes.

David placed his trust in God's care, declaring, "*My times are in Your hand*" (Psalm 31:15). Every moment, every season of life, and every transition from birth to death unfolds beneath God's watchful eye. The temporal world is not a closed system, ticking forward like a clock. It is upheld, governed, and directed by the Creator, whose dwelling place is unbounded by time. Our days are personal and purposeful because they are held in his hand.

God alone knows the measure of each person's life. Moses lived 120 years; Methuselah lived 969; King Josiah of Judah died at 39; and Stephen's life ended while he was still a relatively young man. Each life, long or short, was held in God's hand. Recognizing his sovereignty should lead us to humility, gratitude, obedience, and faith.

Time slips quickly away, and with each passing year the world presses us toward distraction, sin, and unbelief. Paul urged believers to "*redeem the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:16). To redeem our time is to treat it as valuable—not to spend it on vanity, but to use it in ways that honor God.

Our choices give shape to the time entrusted to us. Through daily decisions, we show what we value, where we place our trust, and whether we seek to follow God. Time offers countless opportunities to demonstrate faith and love. Our choices matter because they reveal our response to God, and they always carry consequences.

The temporal world is not the only reality. Scripture teaches that our choices in this life have lasting significance and that we will answer to God for how we have lived. Jesus underscored this in the parable of the talents. A master entrusted resources to his servants while he was away. When he returned, he held them accountable for their stewardship. Their actions revealed their faithfulness and shaped the master's judgment of their service (Matthew 25:14–30).

Though our days in this temporal world are numbered and our strength limited, they are profoundly significant. God entrusts us

with time to steward before him. Our choices may seem ordinary, yet each day gives us an opportunity to love God, obey His Word, and live with eternity in view. To understand time rightly is to receive it with gratitude and use it faithfully.

All of us intrinsically know that our days in this temporal world will eventually pass and be no more. The Bible tells us that it is here that our days are numbered and our free will choices are made. Yet this is not the whole story. Scripture also speaks of an unseen spiritual realm in which those choices have lasting significance. It is to that spiritual world we now turn.

The Spiritual World

The temporal world is what we see, touch, and measure all around us. It is the world we call home. The spiritual world lies beyond our physical senses. Though invisible, it is no less real. Scripture teaches that what we cannot see is essential to understanding life. We are embodied beings, formed from the earth, yet our lives come from God and are lived in relation to him.

From the beginning, Scripture presents this truth: "*The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*" (Genesis 2:7). This account holds together our physical and spiritual dimensions. The dust speaks of our creaturely frailty and material nature, while the breath of life reminds us that our spiritual nature comes from God.

The author of Ecclesiastes echoes this when he writes, "*The dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it*" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Our earthly life joins body and spirit, but death brings physical life to an end. The body returns to dust, and the spirit returns to God, its source. Thus, the temporal world cannot tell the whole story of human life or its accountability to God.

Proverbs reminds us, "*The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart*" (Proverbs 20:27). The proverb portrays the inner life as open to God's searching light. Our motives, loyalties, and affections matter to him, including those hidden from other people. Time records our actions; Scripture reminds us that God also sees the heart from which they come.

Jesus underscored our accountability to God when he said, "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matthew 10:28). Human beings

can end physical life, but they do not have final authority over our destiny. Jesus directs our attention beyond temporal threats to the God before whom every person must answer. The unseen world gives our choices a seriousness that the visible world alone cannot convey.

To understand the spiritual world rightly, we must also understand the nature of God. Jesus said, "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24). Worship is not merely an outward act or ritual; it must arise from a sincere response to God and accord with the truth he has revealed. Thus, true worship involves the whole person.

Paul explains one aspect of this relationship: "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*" (Romans 8:16). Here is the assurance believers receive: the Holy Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they belong to him. This assurance is not simply a conclusion drawn from outward circumstances; it is the testimony of God's Spirit, who dwells in those who trust in Christ.

By contrast, the person relying only on ordinary human perception cannot receive the things of God's Spirit. Paul writes, "*The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Truth is not measured by the senses alone. It is discerned through the work of God's Spirit. Faith does not require us to reject reason; it calls us to receive what God has revealed, including realities beyond what we can see.

These realities include the resurrection of the body. Paul writes, "*It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*" (1 Corinthians 15:44). In its ultimate form, he is describing the resurrection: the body is sown perishable but raised imperishable by God. The Christian hope is not that the body has no value, but that God will raise his people to immortal life. Our mortal condition is temporary, not the final word.

In another passage, Paul describes the longing this hope creates: "*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*" (2 Corinthians 5:1–2). Paul compares our present, mortal life to a temporary tent and speaks of the lasting life God has prepared. This hope does not make earthly life meaningless. It helps us face its frailty while looking toward the life God promises.

The Book of Hebrews identifies God as "*the Father of spirits*" (Hebrews 12:9). He is the source of life and the One to whom we are accountable. The passage uses this truth to urge us to receive God's discipline, which is for our good. Our spiritual nature calls us to recognize our dependence on him and to respond to his guidance.

For this reason, Paul urged believers to "*set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Colossians 3:2). The visible world clamors for attention with its pleasures, fears, and ambitions. Setting our minds on things above does not mean ignoring our earthly responsibilities. It means ordering our lives by the truth of God and the spirit of hope he has given us. The priorities we choose here reveal what we value and where we place our trust.

Recognizing our spiritual nature also changes how we view other people. Scripture teaches that human beings are made in God's image. Our words and actions toward others therefore matter. We do not meet people as mere material bodies passing through temporary life; each person is made by God, is worthy of life, and is accountable to him. This awareness dignifies acts of kindness and warns us against indifference and cruelty.

Our sufferings can be seen in light of the unseen as well. Paul, who suffered greatly for the gospel, declared, "*Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Paul does not call suffering easy. By setting

present suffering beside the eternal glory God promises, he shows that trials are not the final word. The hope of the spiritual world sustains believers through hardship and keeps them looking toward God.

Jesus reminded his followers, "*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys*" (Matthew 6:20). Living with this awareness reshapes our priorities. Careers, possessions, and ambitions are temporary, while life in fellowship with God endures. Prayer, obedience, and love may seem meaningless in the eyes of the world, yet they express our response to God and have lasting significance. They do not purchase eternal life; eternal life is God's gift. To walk by faith is to invest in what cannot be taken away and to live now in light of the life to come.

The Bible presents human life as both earthly and spiritual. We are formed from dust and given life by God; our bodies are mortal. Clocks and calendars measure our days, but the unseen world reminds us that our choices have consequences well beyond the present moment. God, the Father of spirits, calls us to live in light of the truth he has revealed. To heed that call is wisdom; to ignore it is folly. One day, the temporal world will pass away, but God's purposes will remain, and every soul will stand before him. Yet walking with feet in time and hearts in eternity brings its own challenges. Scripture shows us how to keep our balance.

Living in Both Worlds

Every person exists in both the temporal and spiritual dimensions of life. Our feet walk the earth, among people, places, and work; yet Scripture teaches that visible things are not all there is. God's presence is everywhere, and his purposes reach beyond what we can see. Our choices in this life have spiritual significance. The temporal world is where we make those choices; the spiritual world helps us understand their lasting importance.

Because these dimensions of life are joined, we need a reliable guide, a divine user's manual so to speak. Accordingly, God has given us his Word. The Bible is more than history or moral instruction; it teaches us how to live faithfully before God. David declared, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*" (Psalm 119:105). A lamp is essential when walking through the night. Likewise, God's Word guides us through the choices and challenges of earthly life.

Scripture not only illuminates our path through life; it also exposes dangers that threaten to disrupt our walk. It uncovers the snares of sin and the enticements of the world. Hebrews reminds us, "*The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible does more than give external rules. Its words reach the heart, reveal motives, and call us to align our lives with God's truth. Without Scripture, we would lack a sure guide for living in both the temporal world and eternity.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus illustrated the importance of our response to God's Word. He said, "*Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they*

immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:3–8). In Jesus' explanation, the seed is the Word of the kingdom of God, and the soils represent differing responses in human hearts. The parable shows how our response to God's Word becomes visible in the way we live.

Jesus' explanation also describes obstacles to receiving the Word. Some hear but do not understand, and the enemy of God (*i.e.*, our desire to be our own god) snatches away what was sown in the heart. Others receive the Word with joy but fall away when trouble or persecution comes because they have no root. Still others let the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word. But those who hear, understand, and persevere will bear fruit. That fruit reveals that the Word has taken root in the heart. Our responses in everyday life—how we face trouble, temptation, and success—show what we value and where we place our trust.

Temptation presses us to choose immediate satisfaction over faithfulness to God. James wrote, "*Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death*" (James 1:14–15). Temptation works through desires that promise pleasure, advantage, or ease while drawing us away from God's way. When we yield to sin, we turn from the good God desires for us; if left unchecked, sin leads to spiritual death and permanent separation from him.

Temptation often appears in ordinary moments. It whispers through ambition, urging us to sacrifice integrity for advancement. It exploits desire, offering shortcuts to happiness that bypass God's will. It can speak through discouragement, tempting us to despair instead of trust. Scripture also teaches that our struggle has an unseen

spiritual dimension. As Paul reminded the members of the church in Ephesus, "*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 6:12).

How then do we resist? Scripture teaches that temptation is common to all, and that God is faithful to give us power to resist. Paul assured the Corinthians, "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We resist by relying on God's Spirit and his Word. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he answered each enticement of Satan with, "*It is written*" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). The Word of God guides us, and the Spirit of God strengthens us with it. As we turn to God for help, we can choose faithfulness even when the lure of the moment is strong.

Faithfulness in this life may bring hardship, misunderstanding, or persecution, and its value may not be recognized by others. Scripture points us beyond the temporal cost to the hope God promises. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:10). To his faithful servants he will say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your lord*" (Matthew 25:21). These promises encourage us to remain faithful. Our service does not purchase salvation; eternal life is God's gift. Yet our choices matter in this life, and God sees the faithfulness expressed in them.

Paul described the believer's hope this way: "*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*" (Philippians 3:20–21). Though our feet walk earthly paths, our true citizenship is in heaven. Scripture also describes believers as pilgrims, looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10).

Our heavenly citizenship is not meant to be merely a Sunday ritual or a private conviction; it is a spiritual reality that shapes how we live each moment of each day on earth.

The temporal and spiritual dimensions of life belong together. The time we are given provides the setting for choices that reveal our loyalties and responses to God. Scripture promises that faithful service will bear fruit, even when its full value is not seen in the present. Every word spoken, every act of kindness, every temptation resisted, and every step of obedience can express faith and love toward God and neighbor. Through these daily choices, what we believe about eternity takes shape in everyday life.

Scripture reminds us that our allotted time is a sacred trust from God. To live faithfully in both worlds, we must use our fleeting moments wisely, letting God's Word guide our choices and keeping eternity in view. The next chapter considers how God calls us to redeem the time entrusted to us and use it to reflect his glory.

Redeeming the Time

Time is precious because once it has passed, it cannot be reclaimed. Wealth can be lost and regained. Endurance may fade and return with rest. Friendships may be restored. But yesterday cannot be revisited. Each day is a gift entrusted to us by God, and the choices we make within it reveal what we value and where we place our trust. Scripture therefore calls us to use our days with wisdom.

Moses expressed this prayer with piercing clarity: "*So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12). To number our days is more than to count them. It is to assign them value and then redeem them with choices and actions that matter. A wise heart sees life as a brief pilgrimage through time. Numbering our days guards us against presumption and helps us live with purpose.

Ecclesiastes reminds us of the purposeful order in which time unfolds: "*To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Our lives include seasons of joy and sorrow, beginnings and endings. Redeeming the time means asking how we can serve God faithfully in the season we have been given and then responding with diligence and gratitude.

Israel's life was patterned around sacred times. Sabbaths, new moons, appointed feasts, and jubilee years reminded the people that time belonged to God. Every seventh day they stopped their labor; every seventh year the land rested and debts were released; and in the jubilee year, each family's ancestral land was returned. These rhythms taught Israel to honor God's covenant and to order life according to his instructions. Modern life has diminished sacred time, but the principle remains: the time entrusted to us is to be received with gratitude and used in ways that honor God.

Isaiah echoes this urgency: "*Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near*" (Isaiah 55:6). Scripture calls us to seek God now, while we have the opportunity. We should not postpone that response until after a career, retirement, or some other milestone. The time to turn to God and align our lives with his will is today.

The Prophet Micah shows what a life ordered toward God looks like: "*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*" (Micah 6:8). Justice, mercy, and humility are not abstract ideals. They are expressed in daily choices and actions. Time is well used when we act with integrity, show compassion, and walk humbly with God.

The apostle Paul added: "*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:15–16), and "*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time*" (Colossians 4:5). In these passages, redeeming time means making wise use of our opportunities. Every conversation and encounter can give us an opportunity to reflect Christ. A moment of patience, a kind word, or an act of compassion may seem small by itself, but if everyone practiced these things, the world would be changed.

James brings us back to life's fragility and brevity: "*For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*" (James 4:14). Life is short and unpredictable. Redeeming the time begins with humility before God and gratitude for each breath. Because we do not control tomorrow, the opportunity to trust and follow God matters today.

Jesus taught us how to set our priorities: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things*" (Matthew 6:33–34). Redeeming the time does not mean frantic busyness or trying to squeeze more activity into every hour. It means ordering our lives around God's principles. Jesus calls us to trust God

with tomorrow, with its inevitable challenges and needs, and to give our attention to what faithfulness requires today.

In the brief years of his public ministry, Jesus lived in obedience to his Father. He made time for prayer, preached salvation, and gave attention to people in need. At the end, he could say, "*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*" (John 17:4). His example reminds us that redeeming the time does not mean doing everything. It means faithfully doing what God places before us. Our salvation rests on Christ's work; our choices are the response of those who trust him.

David's and Saul's lives show how choices over time can reveal a person's loyalties. David failed seriously, yet his heart repeatedly turned back toward God. Saul often chose self-protection and control over obedience to God's word. Their histories remind us that our use of time reveals what we value. Our daily actions matter for fellowship with God, though they cannot earn the gift of salvation.

Paul's story is even more striking. Before he encountered Christ, he devoted his energy to persecuting the church, believing he was serving God. After Christ called him, Paul devoted himself to proclaiming the gospel. He did not remain captive to regret over his past; he wrote, "*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:14). His story shows that salvation by grace can redirect a life and that our past does not prevent us from serving God in righteousness once we believe his promises.

Jesus also told the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). The servants who used what had been entrusted to them were commended; the servant who buried it was condemned. The parable underscores our accountability for what we have been given. It calls us to faithful stewardship of our abilities and opportunities in this life. Faithful service is the response of those who belong to him.

How can we live this out in daily life? It begins when we choose to open God's Word rather than turn aside to distractions. Time

spent reading and reflecting on Scripture can direct our attention toward God and his purposes. Prayer, too, can shape how we use our time, as we bring our anxieties to him and seek his guidance. Living in daily fellowship with God is really quite simple: we talk to God in prayer; he talks to us through the Scriptures.

Redeeming the time also shapes our relationships. Every interaction gives us an opportunity to invest in people rather than possessions or status. These acts of love may seem ordinary to us, yet they matter greatly to God when done to honor him. Whether we are witnessing, teaching, or preparing meals, we can do our tasks faithfully. Paul wrote, "*Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men*" (Colossians 3:23). When we see our labor as service to Christ, even ordinary work can become an expression of faith.

As good stewards of the life given to us, we should receive each new day with gratitude while recognizing that no one is promised tomorrow. The psalmist prayed, "*Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am*" (Psalm 39:4). Redeeming the time requires treating today as a gift, tomorrow as unknown, and God's promise of eternal life as certain.

How, then, do we best use the time God gives us? As always, Scripture points us to love. Jesus said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two great commandments: to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–40). Time finds its fullest expression when we use it to love God and others. That is why the next chapter turns to the greatest commandment of all, the commandment to love.

Commanded to Love

Love is not optional in biblical faith and worship. It is at the heart of God's covenant with his people, and it is the defining mark of those who belong to him. When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment, he drew from the Torah, from words that every ancient Jewish child learned to recite morning and evening: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Love for God is the foundation of biblical faith. From it flows love for others and a proper regard for ourselves as people made and loved by God. This order guards against self-centeredness and detached religiosity. True love brings balance. To understand it, we must begin where Scripture begins: with the command to love God with our whole being.

The Shema (שְׁמַע)—"*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!*" (Deuteronomy 6:4)—is a declaration of allegiance. Israel was surrounded by nations that worshiped false gods, but God commanded his people to direct their hearts and minds to him alone. Love, in this sense, is more than emotion. It is devotion expressed in obedience, loyalty, and trust. To love God with all our heart is to direct our deepest affections toward him. To love him with all our soul is to place our identity in him. To love him with all our strength is to order our actions, resources, and energy according to his will.

Jesus reaffirmed this truth when a Pharisee asked him about the greatest commandment: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment*" (Matthew 22:37–38). Matthew's wording includes the mind, while Deuteronomy speaks of strength; together, the passages

show that love for God is commanded to engage our whole being. Yet our love for God does not begin with us. "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). God's love is not a reaction to our worthiness; it comes first and awakens our response. He loved us while we were still sinners. As we understand the depth of his love, our hearts respond with gratitude, devotion, and obedience.

Jesus then added a second commandment: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 22:39). He declared, "*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 22:40). The Scriptures call us to love God and to love others. This command was already present in the Torah: "*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord*" (Leviticus 19:18). God was shaping Israel into a community whose treatment of one another reflected his character.

By calling this the "second" commandment, Jesus showed how love for neighbor belongs alongside love for God. If we love God, we must take seriously the dignity of those made in his image. John asks, "*He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen*?" (1 John 4:20). To claim devotion to God while mistreating others is hypocrisy. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:34–35). Jesus grounds his disciples' love for one another in his own example of love—a love that gives itself for others and remains faithful.

Paul echoed this teaching when he wrote to the Romans: "*The commandments…are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*" (Romans 13:9–10). The Ten Commandments prohibit murder, adultery, theft, and covetousness. Love does not abolish these commands; it expresses their intent in the way we treat

others. Temptation may arise, but love directs our choices away from harming our neighbor.

At first, the idea of loving ourselves can seem at odds with the humility the Bible commends. Scripture warns against pride and selfishness. Yet when Jesus commands us to love our neighbor "*as ourselves*," he assumes the ordinary care we give our own lives. The problem is not care for ourselves but the way sin can distort it into pride and feelings of superiority. We learn to regard ourselves rightly by seeing our life and the lives of others as gifts from God.

The psalmist marveled: "*For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalm 139:13–14). A healthy regard for ourselves begins with recognizing that we are God's workmanship. We are not accidents of biology but creations of divine wisdom. Every life carries dignity because it comes from the hand of the Creator.

Paul applied this truth in a practical way: "*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body*" (Ephesians 5:29–30). Just as Christ cares for his people, we should care for ourselves. As we are able, caring for our bodies, minds, and spirits can express gratitude and stewardship toward God, who made and redeemed us.

Our regard for ourselves also rests in our identity as children of God. "*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*" (1 John 3:1). To belong to God as his children is a great privilege. It grounds our worth in his love rather than in our achievements or possessions. When we know ourselves as beloved by God, we can care for ourselves without arrogance and love others without jealousy and covetousness.

The love we are commanded to show reflects the love revealed in the Trinity. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and the Spirit pours God's love into the hearts of believers by giving

understanding of the Father and Son through the Word. Creation and redemption are expressions of God's love, and the Bible teaches that the Spirit dwells within those who trust in Christ. When we love as God commands, we reflect his character. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love*" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

The commands to love God and neighbor are not abstract ideals; they call for daily choices. To love God means praying, seeking his will, and aligning our actions with his Word. To love our neighbor means choosing kindness, forgiveness, and generosity toward family, friends, strangers, and even enemies. To regard ourselves rightly means living with the dignity of belonging to God. We neither despise nor exalt ourselves, but walk humbly as his children.

The path of love is not easy. Love requires sacrifice and patience. It calls us to set aside pride and preference for the good of others. Yet love is not a way to earn God's favor. God loved us first, so our love is a response to his salvation by grace. As we love God, others, and ourselves rightly, our lives reflect his care and character. The command to love draws us into faithful relationships with God and with one another. To love is to live as God created us to live.

The Gift of Free Will

The Bible is essentially an instruction manual for having a successful relationship with God. Its pages teach us how to trust him, obey him, and walk in his ways. Scripture also shows that a response to God involves our will: we may believe or disbelieve, obey or rebel. The ability to make such choices is a gift God has given us.

The opening chapters of Genesis describe the beginning of human life in the presence of God. Adam was created in God's image and placed in the paradise of the Garden of Eden. Before Scripture was written, Adam received God's commands directly. The account presents a human being able to hear and respond to God's words.

Many people miss the point that God created Adam because he wanted to love and be loved. He gave Adam free will so Adam could voluntarily accept love from him and love him in return. The first commandment makes God's desire and claim to the exclusive allegiance of his people clear (Exodus 20:3); Moses later stated the call to love God explicitly: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart*" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

However, God did not create man as an automaton. Love and obedience could not be reduced to mechanical compulsion. Free will was necessary, and with that freedom came responsibility. Adam was free to eat from the trees in the garden, but God commanded him not to eat from one tree: "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Genesis 2:16–17). The command gave Adam a real choice: he could trust God's word and obey, or reject it and disobey.

Later, Moses placed a similar choice before Israel as the people prepared to enter the Promised Land: "*I have set before you life and death,*

blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). In Eden, the choice concerned obedience to God's command. In Moses' address, it concerned Israel's covenant faithfulness and the blessings or consequences that would follow. Both passages show that human choices matter and have consequences.

The Genesis account describes how the serpent, Satan, called the deceiver, tempted Adam and Eve to reject God's word. God had warned them of the consequence of disobedience, but the adversary contradicted him: "*You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:4–5). By contradicting God's warning, Satan sowed suspicion, falsely implying that God was withholding something good from humanity.

The choice before Adam was whether to trust God's word or believe the adversary's lie. Adam chose to disobey. His choice brought the separation from God and the spiritual death God had warned them about. As Paul later explained, "*Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Romans 5:12). After Adam, human beings continued to make choices, but those choices were now made in a world marked by sin and estrangement from God. The knowledge that people could disobey God had infected the human soul.

Ever since, God has continually called people to respond to him in loving obedience. At Shechem, Joshua challenged Israel: "*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Joshua 24:15). Joshua called the people to definitively choose whom they would serve. As we know, their choices shaped the course of their lives, both as a nation and as individuals.

Scripture continued to show that choices carry consequences. Isaiah declared to Judah: "*If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the*

sword" (Isaiah 1:19–20). The passage describes the consequences of Judah's response to God. Ecclesiastes likewise reminds us that "*God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil*" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Our choices reveal what we value and where our allegiance lies, and Scripture teaches that we are accountable to God for how we live.

The New Testament builds on this foundation by presenting God's offer of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. John's Gospel records this promise: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). God gives eternal life; we receive it through faith. Believing is not a payment or achievement that earns salvation. It is the response to God's gracious gift. The central choice is whether to receive or reject the Beloved Son whom God sent to redeem us.

Paul also taught that our choices have consequences in the way we live: "*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey—whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*" (Romans 6:16). Paul warns that our actions express allegiance and shape our conduct. He makes the same point in Galatians: "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*" (Galatians 6:7). Choices have consequences. Sin leads to corruption, while a life directed by the Spirit bears good fruit. Such fruit reflects our response to God's cleansing salvation.

Scripture presents God's call as an invitation that people may accept or reject in this life. In his message to the church in Laodicea, Jesus said, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus calls to those who have been given to him by the Father. Those who hear his call are responsible for how they respond. At the same time, our response does not begin with human effort. God's Spirit convicts us of the truth; Jesus, the living Word,

and the written Word reveal it; and God's mercy gives us the faith that comes by hearing, making our response possible.

Our earthly opportunity to respond to God by exercising free will extends from birth to death. In other words, this freedom to choose or reject him is bounded by this life. Scripture declares that eventually every knee will bow at the name of Jesus and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10–11). Scripture urges us to respond to Christ while we have the opportunity: "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

The writer of Hebrews states, "*It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Death is followed by certain judgment, so the choices we make during life carry lasting significance. Our choices reveal our trust and allegiance. At the same time, God's gift of free will allows us to respond to his call to eternal life through faith in Jesus. Ultimately, our response rests on his prior love: God loved us first, and his grace makes faith possible. We can now consider the implications of this truth.

God Loved Us First

The most profound truth about our relationship with God is this: before we sought to know him, he had already shown his love for us. The apostle John put it simply: "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). Our ability to respond to God rests exclusively on this prior love. He did not wait for us to prove ourselves worthy; he loved us first and made a way for us to be one with him.

The Bible presents creation as an act of God's generous provision. Before Adam drew his first breath, God had prepared a world in which human life could flourish. Light, sky, seas, land, plants, sun, moon, and stars were in place. The earth was the home prepared for the people God would create.

Genesis tells us, "*The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*" (Genesis 2:7). Adam did not ask for life; he did not yet exist to ask. God gave it. The biblical account presents human life, then and now, as a gift that begins with God's initiative.

Eden also reflected God's generosity. Scripture says that God made "*every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*" (Genesis 2:9). The garden provided both nourishment and delight. God gave Adam a place to live, work to do, and a command to obey. His relationship with humanity included both fellowship and responsibility. When Adam and Eve rebelled, sin brought separation from God; yet God continued to call people to himself.

God called Abram, later renamed Abraham, and told him to leave his old life in Ur, promising to bless him and make him a blessing to all nations. That promise was not something earned by Abraham. It began with God's gracious initiative. Later, God

reminded Israel that his choice of them as his people did not rest on their own merit: "*The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers*" (Deuteronomy 7:7–8). Israel's calling to be a priestly nation to the world rested on God's love and promise, and it carried the responsibility of living faithfully before him.

Through the prophets, God continued to call his too-often rebellious people back to him. Jeremiah recorded this promise: "*Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you*" (Jeremiah 31:3). God's love endured through Israel's repeated failures and his calls to repentance. His faithfulness gave them reason to return to him. This promise was spoken to a people who had experienced the consequences of turning from God, showing that his discipline did not cancel his covenant promises and compassion, or diminish his desire to restore them.

The fullest expression of God's love is found in Jesus Christ. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). The order matters: God loved and gave; people are called to believe. Love is the reason for God's forgiveness; Christ's sacrifice is the supreme expression of God's love, and faith is our intended response.

Paul made the same point: "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Christ did not wait until we had made ourselves worthy of his love. His death was God's gracious provision for sinners, including those of us who had not yet been born. We do not earn salvation by choosing well or by first making ourselves deserving. God offers forgiveness and eternal life as gifts, received through faith in Jesus Christ.

God's purpose in Christ was not an afterthought. Paul writes that God "*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be*

holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). This passage directs our attention to the purpose God established in Christ before creation, and it reminds us of his grace. Our hope rests in what God has done and promised, not in any claim to merit on our part.

God's love is also made known to believers through the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, "*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*" (Romans 8:15–16). The Spirit assures those who belong to Christ that they are God's children. As in adoption, the initiative belongs to the one who welcomes and gives a new place in the family.

Jesus said, "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*" (John 6:44). Our response to Christ does not begin with human effort. God calls and draws us to his salvation; his Word presents the good news, and his Spirit affirms it within. His grace comes first, and Scripture calls each person to respond in faith. This is how God's prior love and human freedom belong together. Free will describes our capacity to respond; God's love gives us the reason and the opportunity to respond. God does not compel love. He calls us, offers salvation through Christ, and enables faith by his grace. Our choice to trust him is a response to his love, not a payment that earns it.

Our choices matter because they reveal how we respond to God. Scripture also teaches that we will answer to him for how we have lived our lives. Isaiah pictured God's patient appeal to his chosen and beloved people, Israel: "*I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people*" (Isaiah 65:2). God's offer of love does not erase the possibility of rejection by us or judgment by him. Yet judgment is not a test we pass to earn eternal life. Salvation is God's gift; our response reveals whether we receive or refuse the grace he offers.

Free will, as we saw in the previous chapter, allows us to respond to God's call. It is not the foundation of our relationship with

him. God's love is. He loved us in the act of Creation, giving life and the abundant world in which we live. He showed his faithfulness in covenant, calling Israel and promising blessing to the nations. He demonstrated his love in Christ, who died for sinners. Through the Spirit, he assures believers that they belong to him, and that they will one day enjoy eternal life with him in eternity.

The Certainty of Death

Physical death marks the end of our earthly life, and Scripture teaches that accountability follows. The certainty of death gives seriousness to the choices we make, because they reveal our response to God and have consequences. Yet we must always remember that those choices do not earn eternal life. Scripture presents salvation as God's gift through Jesus Christ.

The story of sin and redemption begins in Eden. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the consequences of sin, including death, entered human experience. God told Adam, "*In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return*" (Genesis 3:19). Human beings were formed from the dust, and to dust they return. From that day onward, mortality has marked every generation. The reality of death is not random; Scripture connects it with sin's entrance into the world.

The psalmist described the brevity of life: "*The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away*" (Psalm 90:10). Even with advances in medicine, human life remains limited. Seventy or eighty years may seem long when viewed from youth, but the years pass quickly. Our earthly pursuits unfold within this brief span.

Solomon wrote, "*A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted*" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Birth and death mark the boundaries of earthly life. People may delay death through care and medicine, but no one can escape it.

Paul put the human condition and God's provision side by side: "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). Sin leads to death, but God gives eternal life

through Christ. Paul's contrast is stark: death is a consequence of sin, while eternal life is a gift. The writer of Hebrews states, "*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Death is followed by judgment. Scripture offers no basis for treating earthly life as an endless cycle of actions and thoughts without consequence. Our lives have an end, and we are accountable to God for how we have lived. Death means that our choices here matter.

Jesus spoke plainly about judgment and its outcomes. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, he concluded, "*And these [the wicked] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*" (Matthew 25:46). The contrast is sobering: banishment to everlasting punishment or eternal life in God's presence. The passage calls us to take seriously how we respond to Christ. Our thoughts and actions reveal the genuineness of that response. Even those who have received salvation by grace and had their sins forgiven will give an account of their lives to Christ; their works will be evaluated for reward, not to determine whether they are saved.

Jesus also said, "*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*" (John 5:28–29). Everyone will be raised in the final resurrection, but not everyone will share the same outcome. The unsaved will face everlasting punishment, while believers' works will be evaluated for reward.

Paul warned the Thessalonians about the judgment awaiting those who reject the gospel: "*In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*" (2 Thessalonians 1:8–9). These are grave words. They warn us that rejecting God's call has consequences, and they point to the seriousness of the choice before us. The apostle

John's vision of the final judgment also describes accountability before God. He writes, "*And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. ... And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*" (Revelation 20:12, 15).

The phrase "small and great" makes clear that no one is exempt from this accounting. Wealth, influence, and reputation cannot shield anyone; every person stands with his or her soul naked before God, whose judgment is not swayed by human status. The open books underscore that nothing is hidden and that the choices made in life matter. Each reader is called to consider where their hope rests.

It is important to understand that Scripture speaks about death and judgment not merely to frighten us but to direct us to our need for Christ. Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins and was raised from the dead. As the one with authority over death, he declared, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die*" (John 11:25–26). For those who trust in him, death does not have the final word. Jesus promises resurrection and eternal life.

Before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for those who would believe in him. His prayer reveals heartfelt desire that they share eternal life. Jesus defines eternal life as knowing the only true God and believing that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), whom God sent. He also asks that future believers be with him and behold his glory. Jesus prayed:

> "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent ... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in*

Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me … Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:1–3, 20–26)

No one is promised tomorrow. Each breath is a gift, and the choices we make today reveal whether we trust God or turn from him. The question is not whether our deeds can make us worthy of salvation. They cannot. The question is whether we will receive God's gift of life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The certainty of death makes the choice before us urgent, but it does not make salvation a reward for choosing well. Eternal life is God's gift, offered through Christ. The next chapter considers this ultimate choice: whether we will trust in him or not.

The Ultimate Choice

Every day brings choices. Some are small and soon forgotten; others shape the direction of our lives. But one choice matters above all: whether we will trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Our answer has lasting significance because Scripture teaches that eternal life is God's gift, received through faith in Christ.

Scripture gives no basis for postponing our response to God until after death; we must respond during this lifetime. The writer of Hebrews states, "*It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). This warning calls us to consider now what basis we will have when we stand before God in judgment. Will we rely on our own record of thoughts and actions, or trust in the salvation Christ secured for us through his atoning death?

The Bible teaches that judgment is certain and sin is universal. We cannot defend ourselves by claiming that our good deeds outweigh our wrongs. Our hope rests not in our own merit, but in Christ.

God's judgment does not mean that he lacks compassion. It means that he takes evil seriously and that it must be nullified in man before he can enter eternity. Paul made this clear when he preached in Athens: "*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead*" (Acts 17:30–31). God calls people to repent of their evil. The resurrection assures us that Jesus is the appointed judge, while Scripture promises forgiveness of sins to those who believe in him (Acts 10:43).

Paul also wrote to the believers in Rome: "*We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee*

shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10–12). This truth gives weight to our choices, but it does not mean that our choices earn salvation. They simply reveal our response to God's offer. Scripture also makes clear that all of us need redemption and forgiveness. Paul writes, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). No one stands before God on the strength of a flawless life, or even a righteous life. Even the person most admired for righteousness and the most hardened criminal share the same need: forgiveness of sins.

The prophet Isaiah put it this way: "*We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6). Isaiah is not saying that acts of kindness or justice and good deeds have no value. He is saying that even our best actions cannot erase sin or give us grounds to claim salvation. Sin is not confined to individual thoughts and actions; it is a spiritual infection deep within our very being. We cannot save ourselves by weighing our good against our bad. The prospect of coming judgment exposes our need for grace.

This need is personal. It is not only humanity in general that has sinned; each of us must answer for the sin in our own life. Left to ourselves, we would have no claim on God's forgiveness. But Scripture proclaims good news: God has provided salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ, who said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). Jesus is not one of many ways to be reconciled to God; he is the only way God has provided.

The apostle Peter declared, "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Salvation is not found in religion, philosophy, moral effort, or good deeds. It is found in Jesus. John's Gospel makes the invitation and its consequences clear: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn*

the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16–18).

Ephesians explains how this salvation is received: "*By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Salvation is God's gift, received through faith; it is not a reward for living well. Paul assures us of the basis for this hope: "*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him*" (Romans 5:8–9). Our hope before God is not in our record but in Christ's work. God forgives and justifies those who trust in Jesus.

Jesus spoke of the life he gives: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life*" (John 5:24). Jesus promises eternal life to those who believe. Their confidence does not rest on a perfect record; it rests on Christ and the gift he gives.

Jesus also described the final separation of believers and unbelievers in Matthew 25. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will divide the nations as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. To the sheep he will say, "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matthew 25:34). To the goats he will say, "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41). The people's actions reveal the nature and genuineness of their response to Christ.

Revelation 20:11–15 gives a sobering picture of the great white throne: "*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. … And*

anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." The vision presents both the record of human deeds and the record found in the Book of Life. It shows our actions matter, but our hope is in the salvation God gives through Christ. Scripture presents two final outcomes: eternal life or the everlasting punishment of separation from God. It offers no assurance of a second chance after death.

We cannot earn our salvation through human effort. Instead, God calls us to place our trust in his Son, the guarantor of redemption. Jesus Christ alone is our hope, and eternal life comes only through him. The ultimate choice—choosing to believe in Jesus for salvation—cannot be postponed indefinitely. Scripture teaches that death is certain and final judgment will follow, but God's loving invitation to eternal life remains open during this lifetime. The choice is ours: will we trust Christ or face the final judgment alone?

Walking in the Spirit

Jesus promised his disciples that after returning to sit at the right hand of the Father, he would send the Holy Spirit to help and guide them. The Spirit's presence in the lives of believers is a gift from God and a source of assurance. He teaches, strengthens, and directs those who belong to Christ. His work does not replace Christ's saving work or make salvation a reward for spiritual performance. Rather, the Spirit helps believers live in response to the salvation God has given through Christ.

At the supper in the upper room on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, "*I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... He dwells with you and will be in you*" (John 14:16–17). Jesus promised that his followers would not be left to serve God by their own strength. The Spirit would remain with them and be in them, making God's presence known in their lives.

Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in everyone who belongs to Christ. Paul wrote, "*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His*" (Romans 8:9). The Spirit's presence is not a later experience reserved for a few believers. It belongs to everyone who is in Christ. This does not mean that believers never struggle with faith or that their feelings are always pure. It means that their standing with God rests on Christ, with the Spirit bearing witness to that truth.

Jesus further promised: "*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you*" (John 14:26). Jesus gave this promise to his disciples, who would remember and accurately record his words. Today, the Spirit continues to help believers understand

Scripture and apply its truth. He brings Christ's teaching to bear on the choices and challenges of life, reminding us that we are not left alone to rely on our own wisdom.

In another statement recorded by John, Jesus explained, "*When He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*" (John 16:8). The Spirit exposes sin and points people to their need for God. His conviction can lead a person to repentance. In the lives of believers, it helps them recognize sin and turn back to God. This work is not a basis for despair or a way to earn forgiveness. The Spirit directs us to Christ, whose righteousness and saving work are the believer's hope.

Jesus also declared, "*When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth ... He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you*" (John 16:13–14). Jesus' words point to the Spirit's work among the disciples as witnesses to Christ. The Spirit does not focus attention on the believer. Just the opposite. He glorifies Christ and makes his truth known. As believers grow in understanding of Scripture, love for Christ, and faithfulness to his teaching, they see the Spirit's work unfold within them. Spiritual experiences are measured by whether they accord with God's truth and honor Christ.

Before his ascension, Jesus promised his disciples, "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). The Spirit's power enabled the disciples to bear witness to Jesus, and, ever since, it has continued to strengthen believers in their witness to the world. He gives courage to speak about Christ, wisdom to answer questions, and strength to endure opposition. This public witness complements the Spirit's work within believers. It is not a means of earning salvation, but an overflow response in gratitude for the good news they have received.

Paul reinforced the certainty of the promise when he wrote, "*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in*

our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). The Spirit helps believers know and trust the love God has shown. That assurance rests on God's love demonstrated in Christ, not on a passing feeling or a record of personal achievement. The Spirit strengthens hope, enabling believers to face suffering without concluding that God has abandoned them.

Paul returned to this theme in his letter to the Romans: "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God ... The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*" (Romans 8:14–16). The Spirit's indwelling presence assures believers that they belong to God and leads them to call him "*Abba, Father.*" This assurance is not something they create for themselves. It comes from the Spirit and rests on their relationship with God through Christ. Their confidence comes not from having lived perfectly, but from the Spirit's witness that God has welcomed them as his children.

Paul also described how the Spirit equips believers to serve in the universal church, the body made up of all who trust in Christ: "*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit ... the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*" (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). The Spirit gives different gifts to different people. Some gifts are more public, such as teaching or leading; others may be expressed through helping or showing mercy or prayer. All are given for the good of the church. These gifts do not establish a person's worth or earn a place in God's family. They are ways believers serve one another.

Paul also listed the fruit of the Spirit: "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Galatians 5:22–23). Gifts differ from person to person, but these qualities describe the character the Spirit cultivates in believers. Their growth may be gradual, and believers do not display them perfectly. Yet as they respond to God, the Spirit helps them grow in love, patience, kindness, and self-control.

Finally, Paul assured believers that the Spirit is the guarantee of their inheritance: "*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession*" (Ephesians 1:13–14). The Spirit's seal marks believers as belonging to God, and his presence points ahead to the inheritance God has promised. Their assurance rests on God's faithfulness and Christ's saving work.

Together, these passages show how the unseen Spirit's work becomes visible in believers' lives. He indwells them, helps them understand and follow God's truth, convicts them of sin, and directs their attention to Christ in all things. In addition, he strengthens their witness, assures them of God's love, confirms their place in God's family, equips them to serve, cultivates spiritual fruit, and assures them of their promised inheritance. In all these ways, the Spirit helps believers live out their response to the grace they have received.

Jesus' promise of the Spirit assures believers of God's abiding presence and love. The Spirit's indwelling is not earned by a believer's seeking; assurance rests not on feelings but on Christ's promise and work. The Spirit bears witness to that truth and helps believers live in light of it. To walk in the Spirit is to follow his leading in faith, trusting the salvation God has given through Jesus.

Refined into Gold

Faith in Christ does not exempt believers from the trials of this life or from suffering, possibly even persecution. Scripture describes occasions when God tested or refined his people, using trial and tribulation to reveal and strengthen faith. The biblical images of gold and silver being refined help show how hardship may shape a life of faith, though not every painful circumstance should be assumed to be a direct test from God.

Job, a man who was well acquainted with suffering, declared his confidence in the midst of trial: "*But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:10). Job lost family, health, and possessions, yet he trusted that God knew the way he had taken. His words express the hope that, through testing, he would emerge with faith intact. They remind believers that suffering need not be meaningless, even when its purpose is not clear. God can use hardship to produce endurance and maturity, but suffering itself does not earn salvation or guarantee a particular outcome in this life.

The psalmist spoke of a communal time of testing: "*For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment*" (Psalm 66:10–12). The psalm recalls a people who endured affliction and were brought through it by God. This passage shows how a community may recognize God's care through hardship, without suggesting that every person's suffering follows the same course.

Proverbs makes the refining image plain: "*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts*" (Proverbs 17:3). The proverb compares the refining of precious metals with the Lord's

testing of the heart. Testing the heart's desires can reveal pride, misplaced trust, or other failures that a person might not otherwise recognize. The image of refining suggests that God's searching work can purify those who turn to him. Such turning is not a payment for salvation but part of the life of faith.

Isaiah recorded the Lord's words to Israel: "*Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction*" (Isaiah 48:10). These words address a people whose history included judgment, hardship, and God's continuing purpose for them. They show that God can work through affliction, teaching his people to depend on him. We should not assume, however, that every difficulty in a believer's life is a punishment or a specific test sent by God. This passage speaks to Israel's particular circumstances and reminds us of God's faithfulness to his people.

Zechariah gave another prophetic picture: "*I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The Lord is my God'*" (Zechariah 13:9). In this passage, refinement leads to renewed covenant relationship. The people call on God, and he claims them as his own. The image encourages believers to call on God in hardship and trust his faithfulness.

Malachi used the same image to describe the day of the Lord's testing of Levi, the tribe set apart for covenant service in Israel's worship: "*For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness*" (Malachi 3:2–3). The prophet speaks of the Lord purifying the sons of Levi so they may offer acceptable worship. The picture is of careful, purposeful cleansing. For believers, it is a reminder that God desires faithful service from his people, not to earn salvation, but as a testimony to the righteousness of his ways.

Jesus spoke of the blessing promised to those persecuted for righteousness: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven*" (Matthew 5:10–12). Jesus was speaking specifically of persecution endured for his sake, not claiming that all suffering is a sign of God's blessing. He promised a reward in heaven to those who remain faithful amid such opposition. That reward is distinct from salvation, which is God's gift.

Paul described how tribulation can shape the lives of believers: "*And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope*" (Romans 5:3–4). Paul does not say that suffering is pleasant or that it automatically makes people stronger. He says that believers can find hope even in tribulation because God can use it to produce perseverance and character. This hope rests in God's love. Paul explains that "*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*" (Romans 5:5).

Paul, who endured beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, cold, and imprisonment, compared earthly affliction with future glory: "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Paul was not denying the real weight of suffering. He was comparing it with the glory God promises beyond this life. From the perspective of eternity, present affliction is temporary, while the glory to come is lasting. This hope does not make pain insignificant; it assures believers that suffering will not have the final word.

Peter also described trials as a proving of faith: "*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory*

at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6–7). Peter acknowledges that trials are unwelcome and cause grief among believers. He compares tested faith with gold refined by fire, while teaching that faith is more precious than refined gold if it endures. Trials and tribulations in this life can reveal the genuineness of faith.

Taken together, these passages show that God may use trials to reveal and shape faith. Scripture gives particular examples of God testing or refining his people for our benefit. Hardship in this life does not by itself prove that a person belongs to God, nor does enduring it earn salvation. Believers' hope rests in Christ's work. Within that hope, they can ask God for help, persevere through suffering, and trust that he can use even painful circumstances to deepen their faith and prepare them for the glory to come.

This perspective can change how believers face suffering. They may grieve without losing hope, seek help rather than despair, and continue trusting God when they do not understand what they are experiencing. Growth may come through trials, but it is neither automatic nor the basis of God's acceptance. The refiner's image reminds believers of God's care; it does not require them to call every hardship good or to assume they know why it happened.

Job's words remind us that God's testing has meaning: "*When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.*" The believer's confidence, however, rests not in the joy of being tested or refined by God, but in God's grace through Christ. Trials may shape faith, but they do not secure salvation. The believer rests in the knowledge that The Refiner is faithful, and that God will bring those who trust in Christ to the glory he has promised.

Crowned in Glory

Salvation through faith in Christ gives believers eternal life, but Scripture also speaks of reward for faithful service. These are distinct: the crown of salvation is God's gift, not a wage earned by human effort. The reward crowns described are images of the honor God will give his people for their faithful service. They direct our attention to his grace and to the faithfulness he enables in those who trust him.

Paul, nearing the end of his life, said with confidence: "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*" (2 Timothy 4:7–8). Paul endured hardship, persecution, and loss, yet he looked ahead with hope. He expected the Lord, the righteous Judge, to reward those who long for Christ's appearing. Paul's crown of righteousness was a reward for faithful service.

The Bible uses several crown images to describe aspects of the reward God promises. Paul speaks of a "*crown of righteousness*" for those who love Christ's appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). Peter promises "*the crown of glory that does not fade away*" to elders who faithfully shepherd God's people when "*the Chief Shepherd appears*" (1 Peter 5:4). Though Peter addresses church leaders, the passage affirms that faithful service to Christ by all believers is seen and honored by him. James writes of "*the crown of life*" promised to the one who perseveres under trials and tribulations (James 1:12), and Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10).

These passages encourage believers to remain faithful through suffering and persecution. Paul uses another image, comparing the believer's reward to an imperishable crown: "*Everyone who competes for*

the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:25). Earthly prizes fade; the reward God gives endures. Scripture's different crown images need not be treated as a precise list of separate rewards. Together, they portray the honor God promises to those who serve him faithfully.

Jesus illustrated reward in his parable of the talents. A master entrusted his servants with different amounts of money, and those who used their portion to increase the master's wealth were faithful and received this commendation: "*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord*" (Matthew 25:21). The parable points to the master's reward: approval and greater responsibility. Jesus' words assure his servants that their faithfulness matters. The reward recognizes service offered in response to the master's trust.

The book of Revelation adds another image of the honor and security Christ promises: "*Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God*" (Revelation 3:11–12). The image of a pillar conveys permanence and belonging in God's presence. Jesus calls his followers to hold fast, trusting his promise of a secure place with God.

Paul also describes believers as heirs who share in Christ's inheritance and future glory: "*If children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*" (Romans 8:17). To be a child of God is to receive an inheritance by grace. This inheritance is not measured in earthly possessions, but in the life God promises with Jesus. Paul's words point to the glory believers will share with Christ, not to status earned by suffering.

Paul continues by contrasting present suffering with future glory: "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18). This hope does not make suffering trivial; it assures believers that hardship

will not define their future. Their inheritance is the life and glory God gives them with Christ, not a payment they earn by suffering.

The promise of reward is joined with accountability. Paul writes, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This passage teaches that the Lord will evaluate how we have lived. Paul also describes this evaluation in 1 Corinthians: a person's work will be tested, and what endures will receive a reward (1 Corinthians 3:12–15). Such evaluation shows that our choices and service matter to God, who sees even acts of faithfulness others overlook.

Jesus declared, "*And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work*" (Revelation 22:12). The reward comes from Christ. He knows his people and remembers their service. The passage reinforces both accountability and hope: our lives matter to the Lord, and he will judge with perfect knowledge.

What does this mean for believers now? The promise of reward encourages faithfulness without turning service into a way to earn salvation. Crowns remind us that God sees what is done in trust and love, even when others do not. Earthly praise fades, but the Lord's recognition endures. Paul expressed this aim when he wrote, "*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:14). His life involved hardship, yet he kept his attention on Christ and the hope God had set before him. That same hope encourages believers to serve faithfully today.

Paul's willingness to endure hardship in obedience to his calling also shows how highly he valued the privilege of serving Christ. Writing from prison, he rejoiced that his circumstances had helped spread the gospel (Philippians 1:12–18), saying, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (verse 21). He considered everything else loss compared with "*the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my*

Lord" (Philippians 3:8). Paul's calling and devotion were exceptional; not every believer is asked to endure his hardships or serve as an apostle. Yet his example shows that serving Christ can be worth more than comfort or recognition.

The crowns promised in Scripture are not grounds for pride in personal achievement today; they are used as symbols of the honor Christ will graciously give in glory to recognize a lifetime of earthly obedience and service. Paul looked forward to a crown of righteousness, Peter described a crown of glory, and James and Jesus spoke of a crown of life. These promises assure believers that obedience and faithful service will not be forgotten.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Our lives tell stories that unfold in two intertwined worlds. Each morning we enter the visible world of clocks and calendars, work and laughter, beginnings and endings. Yet Scripture also speaks of an unseen spiritual reality and of life beyond this lifetime. The parable of the raising of Lazarus reminds us that we exist in both realms.

Our choices in this temporal life reveal our response to God and carry consequences. In the wilderness, God tested Israel "*to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart*" (Deuteronomy 8:2). That was Israel's particular experience. The choices we make in our own lives likewise reveal where we place our trust and what we value.

At the center of our response to God is love. Jesus identified the greatest commandment: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37). Our acts of faith, our words, and our choices to resist temptation can express love for God. When we refuse to trust or choose to rebel, those choices reveal a different response, one that condemns us.

Our response to God begins with an understanding of his love for us. Paul writes, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). We do not earn God's favor through good works. Salvation is his gift, received through faith in Jesus, whose death on the cross atoned for our sins and whose resurrection from the dead assures us of eternal life. The Spirit prompts our faith in response to the love God has shown us.

The Bible teaches that each person's physical death is followed by accountability: "*It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus paid the redemption price for the forgiveness of our sins. Those who trust in Christ receive this

promise: *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). We enter eternity without guilt.

Scripture also promises that God will dwell with his people in loving fellowship, wiping away every tear and making all things new (Revelation 21:3–5). Until then, we can pray with the psalmist, *"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom"* (Psalm 90:12). Wisdom means living faithfully according to God's will in the time we are given, with eternity in view. Each day brings opportunities to trust God, love our neighbors, and serve faithfully.

This pursuit of wisdom calls us to live righteously by obeying God's commandments, but submission to God does not mean that believers must live without personal satisfaction and joy. Just the opposite: the Spirit helps believers live out their faith, and the promise of life with God steadies them through good times and bad. The final word belongs not to death, but to the life eternal through Christ.

Jesus' parable of the talents pictures the master commending a faithful servant: *"Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your Lord"* (Matthew 25:23). That parable encourages faithful service in obedience. Our hope and joy rest only on God's gift of salvation by grace through his Son.

I close this book with this prayer: May the God who numbers your days help you live with eternity in mind. May his Spirit guide your steps, steady your heart in hardship, and fill your life with his enduring love. May you trust in the salvation God gives through Christ and look forward to life in his presence. Until that day, let us pray the prayer of yearning for his glorious return ...

"Come, Lord Jesus!"

Postscript

TO HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

You must accept the salvation offered by God and make that choice known to him before your days on earth come to an end. If you are ready, you can begin your walk with him and enter into the fellowship of believers right now. Simply bow your head and go to God in prayer, speaking from your heart in words like these:

> *Heavenly Father, I confess that I have rebelled against your authority and need your forgiveness for my sin. I believe that Jesus is your beloved Son, that he died to atone for my sins, and that you raised him from the dead, confirming his authority over death. Today I turn from my old ways and accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Help me understand your Word and teach me to walk in faith. Thank you for the gift of eternal life. Amen.*

If you prayed with sincerity, God has adopted you as one of his children. "*For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Romans 10:13). Now your sins are forgiven, and you have begun the most important journey of your life—a life lived in fellowship with God.

As you take your first steps, here are three simple truths to guide you:

- Make the Bible your constant companion and ultimate authority. Every instruction you need for living in full fellowship with God is found in its pages. As you read, let prayer flow naturally, especially when you seek understanding. God has promised to reward those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6), and he never fails to keep his promises.
- Remember that following Jesus is not complicated. Success is not measured by following a checklist of rules or by performing religious rituals. It is measured by becoming the person God wants you to be through reading and being obedient to his Word.
- Be assured, you don't need a religious authority or special training to understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit uses the many dependable translations and study tools available today to make God's message accessible to everyone. But it only works if you read your Bible.

As a new believer, what matters most is maintaining an ongoing two-way conversation with God. As his child, you can pray directly to the Father at any time, and he will answer you through his Word. You talk to God in prayer; he talks to you through the Bible. It's that simple.

Bible Study Resources

BIBLE GATEWAY
www.biblegateway.com

BLUE LETTER BIBLE
www.blueletterbible.org

Books by this author are available online, most at no charge, from The Prophecy Society website at www.prophecysociety.org