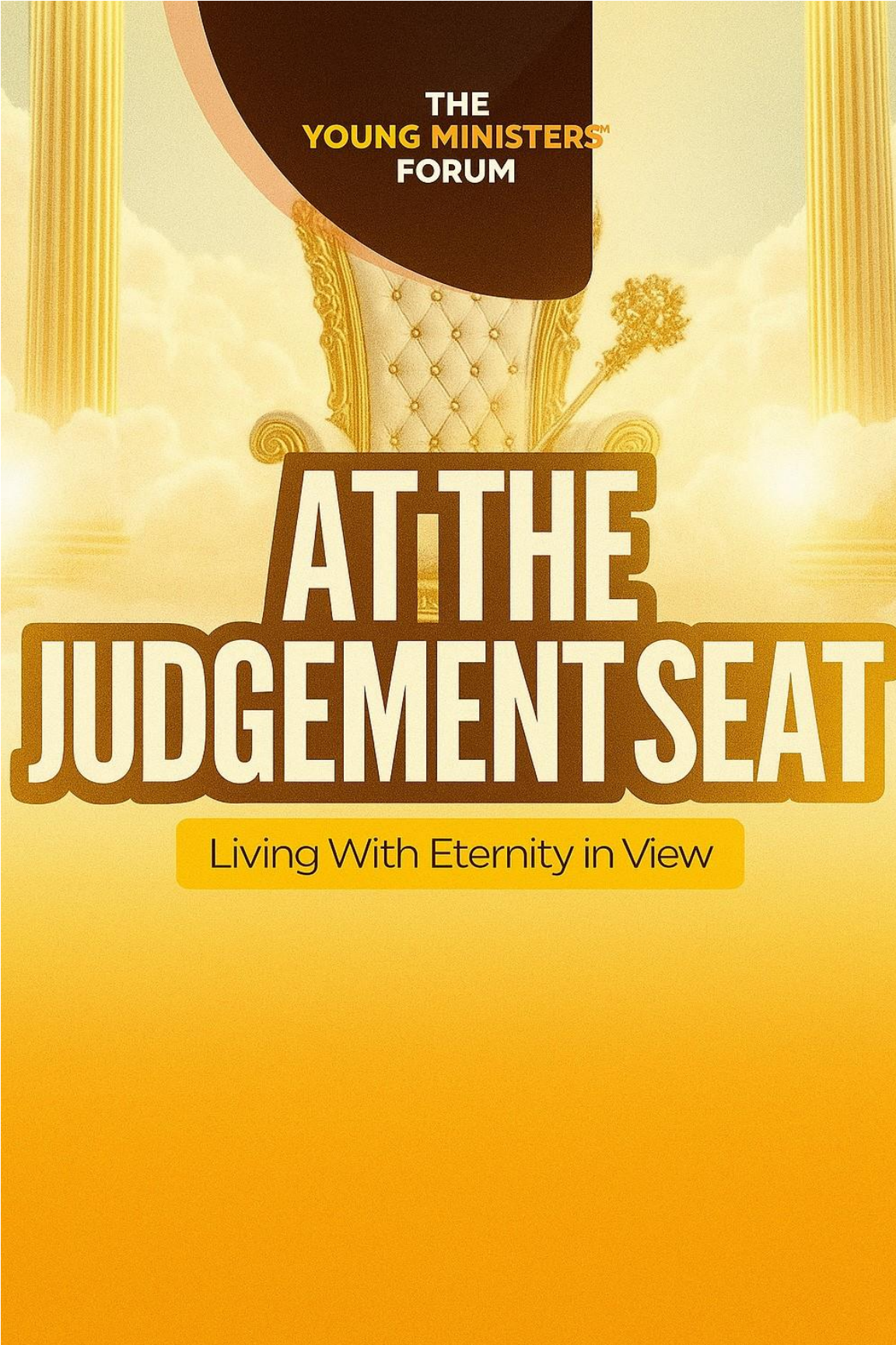




THE
YOUNG MINISTERSSM
FORUM

AT THE JUDGEMENT SEAT

Living With Eternity in View

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission from the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews, discussions, or teaching with proper attribution.

This document is produced as part of the Young Ministers' Forum initiative to equip and edify ministers for sound doctrine, effective ministry, and spiritual growth. The views expressed align with biblical teachings and the mission of the Forum.

For permissions, inquiries, or distribution requests,

contact +2348089440040 or send a mail to:

theyoungministersforum@gmail.com

Scripture quotations are taken from KJV unless otherwise noted.

Current Issue: September, 2025

ISSUE PAPER:

THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST: LIVING WITH ETERNITY IN VIEW

Introduction

A man once told his child, “I’m afraid of your success.” The child was shocked. “Do you mean you’re afraid of my failure, or afraid of my success?” The father replied, “I’m not afraid that you’ll be successful, but I’m afraid that you’ll be successful in the wrong thing.”

It is indeed possible to be successful in the wrong thing, and that is a matter of evaluation. The standard of judgment determines whether success is true or misplaced. This is particularly essential for the believer because our standard and measure of success are vastly different from the world’s definition of success.

Hence, our call is that of stewardship—that of faithfulness, of living and doing exactly according to God’s standards, with eternity in view. For the Christian, it is not primarily the success itself that matters, but the mindset of stewardship. A believer is not first concerned with personal success, but with satisfying the Master (Matthew 25:21). Faithfulness in stewardship becomes the true measure of our lives.

What is success? Success is achieving a goal. But what happens when we achieve the wrong goals? As believers, our lives are not merely about accomplishing personal ambitions. Our lives are about fulfilling the goals, the aims, and the mind of God (Romans 12:2, ESV).

We live in a time where the word success is repeated constantly. Society talks about it in worldly terms. The measures are determined by trends and times. Even believers today have often adopted these definitions.

The Bible warns us about the world system: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* (1 John 2:15, ESV)

The world is driven by: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (1 John 2:16, ESV)

It is an insatiable desire for things that self-centered—things that feed the eyes, fuel the appetites, and create a sense of worth apart from Him. Social media has only intensified this. Everywhere we look, there are parades of self-promotion, selfies, and curated images of success. Success is flaunted by all to have a sense of worth and significance. Many believers are caught in this illusion, chasing things that do not truly matter. Happiness becomes tied to likes, shares, trending videos or reels and recognition rather than faithfulness to God.

Even in religious circles, this is evident. Some use religion as a platform to gain fame, to promote themselves, or to silence others. Long prayers, ministry events, podcasts, music, gifts, and public service can become tools of self-exaltation rather than true worship. Jesus warned against this:

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.” (Matthew 6:2, NIV)

We blow our trumpets! “If you don’t blow, you can’t blow”. We are taught to blow our trumpets, to scream it from the rooftops, and doing so alone becomes what many chase after. I mean, there is a feeling of blowing your trumpets in religious centres or street corners that makes you great in the sight of men. Jesus said that feeling, that momentary excitement, is the only reward you get. Such a man gets nothing from god. But that is not the goal of a believer. Our focus is greater. We live with eternity in view. We look forward to something far beyond earthly recognition or praise—the reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where faithfulness and stewardship, not showmanship, will be honored:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10, ESV)

This booklet is an invitation to pause, reflect, and reorient our hearts. It is a call to live faithfully, invest wisely, and pursue the things that matter for eternity. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, what we long to hear is not the applause of the world, but the words of our Lord: *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* (Matthew 25:21, ESV)

“O God, stamp eternity on my eye balls!” Jonathan Edwards

The Judgment Seat of Christ: Meaning and Weight

The New Testament uses the Greek word *bēma* to describe the “*judgment seat*.” The term can carry different shades of meaning. At times, it speaks of a tribunal where condemnation is pronounced (cf. Acts 25:10). In other settings, however, it refers to an elevated platform where rewards are distributed. The two primary contexts In ancient Greek and Roman society:

1. **Judicial Bēma:** In Roman courts, the *bēma* was the platform from which magistrates or judges pronounced verdicts. It was not just a place of authority but a space where decisions were publicly communicated. Citizens stood before the *bēma* to give accounts of their actions or defend their conduct.
2. **Athletic Bēma:** In the Greek Olympics and other contests, the *bēma* was the podium or stage where judges awards victors, where they receive crowns or prizes. The athlete did not invent the prize but earned it through discipline, training, and perseverance, standing on the platform to receive recognition from the authorities of the games.

Implications for the Believer

The Judgment Seat of Christ (the *bēma* of Christ) combines aspects of both these uses: It is a tribunal, where every believer's stewardship, works, and motives will be evaluated by Christ. It is also a reward platform, where faithful service is openly and eternally commended and rewarded.

It is in this sense that Paul employs the word when he speaks of the believer's final evaluation, reward, and honor. It is a place of accountability, recognition, and reward. Paul draws on this picture to describe the moment when every believer will stand before Christ to give an account of his life. Twice, he uses the phrase "the judgment seat of Christ":

"For we shall all stand before the judgment seat [bēma] of Christ." (or God, depending on version. Seems God is more accurate, though contextually Christ is being referred to as God. Romans 14:10 (KJV)

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat [bēma] of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Corinthians 5:10 (KJV)

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 4:1–5, Paul describes ministers as stewards of the mysteries of God who will one day be judged by Christ, not according to human opinion or even their own self-assessment, but by the Lord who will expose hidden motives and give praise where it is due.

This truth fills the Christian life with both hope and sobriety. On the one hand, it is something to look forward to: the faithful will be rewarded by Christ Himself. On the other hand, it is also something fearful, because Christ's perfect standard far exceeds our own. What seems right in our eyes may not meet His measure.

Paul himself expressed this tension:

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.”
1 Corinthians 4:3–4 (KJV)

This was not false humility, but a sober recognition that the final verdict rests with Christ alone. In an interview with Billy Graham, one of the most influential Christian leaders of the 20th century, who began preaching live sermons in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He became known for filling stadiums and other massive venues around the world. When he was asked in his later years what he desired most at his old age, he replied that he cared little for men’s praise, but only for the commendation of God: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21, KJV). Yet even he admitted that he wasn’t sure if he would hear that from the Lord. That came as a shock. That is so terrifying to me. Such honesty reminds us that the Judgment Seat is not to be treated lightly.

This is what makes the Judgment Seat both hopeful and fearful (in reverence). It is hopeful, because Christ promises to reward every act of faithful service. It is fearful, because His judgment will reach beyond appearances to motives, desires, and the counsels of the heart.

The believer, therefore, must live with watchfulness, humility, and a spirit of stewardship. The ultimate goal is not worldly applause, self-promotion, or even personal definitions of success. The goal is faithfulness to the Master, so that on that day we may receive His commendation. For in the end, it is not the world’s verdict that matters, nor even our own. It is the verdict of Christ at His judgment seat.

His Plan For Me

When I stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ
And He shows His plan for me,
The plan of my life as it might have been
Had He had His way - and I see
How I blocked Him here, and checked Him there,
And I would not yield my will,
Will there be grief in my Savior's eyes,
Grief though He loves me still?

Would He have me rich and I stand there poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
While memory runs like a hunted thing,
Down the paths I cannot retrace.

Lord, of the years that are left to me
I give them to Thy hand
Take me and break me and mold me,
To the pattern that Thou hast planned!
-Author Unknown

What Comes to Mind When We Hear “Judgment Seat”?

The New Testament presents several rich images to help us grasp what the Judgment Seat of Christ means for believers. Each image points to accountability, testing, and reward. I will be considering three

- 1. The Stewards: The Servant and the Master**
- 2. The Athlete's: The Discipline and the Prize**
- 3. The Building: Tested by Fire**

The Stewards: The Servants and Master

A steward is a caretaker. He is in charge of that which does not belong to him. He has a Lord and Master who owns all that he manages. In biblical times most stewards were slaves. Hence, they are also owned by their

master. The steward works under the authority of his Master, and therefore, he must be diligent and faithful in his responsibilities. He must ensure that he does exactly all that he has been called to do—faithfulness is non-negotiable.

The steward must also keep detailed accounts of all his works as a demonstration of his faithfulness. He will be evaluated after a period by the Master, who will examine everything under his stewardship. The Master will check what is in his care and see if the steward has carried out his duties according to the Master's standard. The purpose of this evaluation is not only correction but also commendation and reward. The evaluation itself is the judgment of stewardship. It's the test of accountability.

Jesus illustrated this principle in Luke 16:1–2 (KJV):

“And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.”

In this parable, the steward was afraid of the day of reckoning. He attempted to employ dubious means after the Master became aware, trying to cover up his mismanagement. He was slothful and unfaithful. *“How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.”* All stewards will be called to give an account of their stewardship, and so you will, dear saint. If he fails, he could lose his stewardship. Unfaithfulness disqualifies.

As believers, we are stewards of Christ. Like Eliezer was to Abraham, we are entrusted with much but own nothing ourselves. Eliezer was responsible for all Abraham's wealth, yet he acted solely on the Master's errand. Even when delayed by Rebekah's family, he maintained focus:

Genesis 24:34,54-56: *“And he said, I am Abraham's servant. And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master”.*

Eliezer's mission was not for his own enjoyment but to bring joy to his master. He acted faithfully, diligently, and with urgency. Likewise, believers are entrusted with the wealth of creation, the truth and mysteries of the gospel, and the spiritual gifts and manifestations given by the Spirit. All of these are resources to be used for the Master's purposes.

Stewardship of Creation:

“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28, KJV)

Stewardship of Truth / Mysteries:

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1–2, KJV)

Stewardship of Spiritual Gifts:

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” (1 Corinthians 12:4–7, KJV)

Stewardship of the Wealth of Redemption:

Believers have been given the blessings of Christ, the benefits of the cross, and the privileges of redemption. Our rights and authority in Christ are not for self-enjoyment but to serve God's purposes.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

Leonard Ravenhil once mentioned a conversation he had with Tozer: *"I think again of a statement A. W. Tozer made to me once. He said, 'Len, you know, we'll hardly get our feet out of time into eternity that we'll bow our heads in shame and humiliation. We'll gaze on eternity and say, 'Look at all the riches there were in Jesus Christ, and I've come to the Judgment Seat almost a pauper.'" For God had not only given us Jesus Christ - He has with Him freely given us all things (Rom. 8:32)."*

Before Christ evaluates us at the Judgment Seat, we must examine ourselves in the light of His purposes, nature, and Word. We must honestly assess whether we have been faithful or slothful stewards.

1 Corinthians 11:31: *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged".*

We have the Spirit and God's Word as tools for self-examination. A disciplined steward keeps busy with the Master's work, ensuring that everything is done according to His pattern, His mind, and His purpose:

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23–24, KJV)

Stewardship of God's House: The Example of Moses

Moses provides a compelling example of stewardship as a faithful servant of God. He was given detailed instructions for the construction of the house of the Lord on Mount Sinai. These instructions were

comprehensive: they included dimensions, patterns, materials, and directives for who would perform each task.

“See that you make them according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” (Exodus 25:40, NIV).

Note specifications in materials "This is the offering..."

Exodus 25:2-4: *“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And **this is the offering** which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair”*

Moses' faithfulness was evident in his obedience to details. He did exactly what God commanded, following the pattern revealed to him without deviation or innovation. He built according to God's mind, not his own.

“Then Moses said to the Israelites, ‘See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.’” (Exodus 31:2–5, NIV)

“According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the Israelites did all the work. And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the Lord commanded, so they had done it. And Moses blessed them.” (Exodus 39:32–43, ESV)

Moses' stewardship demonstrates that faithfulness is measured by obedience to God's instructions and exact fulfillment of His pattern. You cannot do “oversabi”—it is exactly what God requires that must be done. Innovation or deviation may seem creative, but in stewardship, it is faithfulness to the Master's instructions that matters, not human ingenuity.

When Nadab and Abihu deviated and innovated something that seems nice, they died;

Leviticus 10:1: 9: *“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not”.*

The Bag of Gold

When we speak of the Parable of the Talents, we can think of it as “The Bag of Gold.” Here, the gold represents hard, tangible value—something real, something that cannot easily vanish.

Imagine a master giving five bags of gold, two bags, or even one bag to his servants. In that time, a bag of gold was worth immense labor—the equivalent of 20 years of wages for a worker. So giving five bags to one person is like entrusting them with a fortune worth hundreds of years of labor.

The master entrusted this wealth to be invested, not hoarded. Each servant was expected to add value—to multiply what was given, to create increase, to make profit. The gold itself is not the final goal; the purpose is to generate more value, to bring about growth that continues beyond the initial capital.

Here we see a parallel with how Christ has entrusted Himself to us. The Bible reminds us that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, a price far beyond any earthly wealth (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Through His redemption, God has entrusted us with:

The wealth of redemption: our salvation and the resources of grace (Ephesians 1:7–8).

His Spirit: the presence and power of God within us (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:11).

His Church (Acts 20:28)

His commission and purpose: the mission of making disciples, expanding the kingdom, and living according to His will (Matthew 28:18–20).

This entrustment is not given for passive keeping; it is given so that we may invest it intelligently, with diligence and faithfulness, to bring forth fruit and multiply value. Just as the master in the parable expected his servants to work with the gold, so Christ expects us to use His gifts, His Spirit, His truth, and the Church itself to produce increase—to live a life that honors the investment He has made in us.

The parable reminds us that stewardship is about adding value that continues, about recognizing that God’s gifts are entrusted to us for multiplication, for faithful management, and for kingdom purposes. The value of what Christ has done—the cross, His death, and resurrection—is measured not just by the gift itself, but by what we do with it. The purpose of this entrusted value is that it be actively used, wisely invested, and multiplied for His glory.

In other words, stewardship is not only about possession; it is about intelligent management, faithful multiplication, and maximizing the return of what God has entrusted to us—both individually and as the Church.

Trading and Multiplying His Investment on Earth

A key question arises: How do we trade and multiply Christ’s investment on earth? Before His ascension, Jesus gave His disciples a clear mandate:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20, ESV)

This is the fundamental way to multiply what God has entrusted to us. Our stewardship is measured:

- **Preaching the Word of God** – Faithfully communicating the gospel, teaching truth, and guiding others in God’s ways:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42–47, ESV)

- **Making Disciples** – Investing time, resources, and spiritual energy into raising new followers of Christ who, in turn, reproduce spiritual fruit in proof of transformed lives and salvation of others:

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2, ESV)

- **Expanding Influence and Impact** – The early Church in Acts grew numerically, territorially, and spiritually:

Numerically – Thousands were added daily as the Word spread:

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41, ESV)

“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” (Acts 4:4, ESV)

Territorial Impact and Influence – The gospel crossed regions, cities, and cultures through the power of the Holy Spirit and God’s presence:

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7, ESV)

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” (Acts 9:31, ESV)

Multiplication – Believers trained other leaders, planted new churches, and extended the kingdom exponentially:

“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen ... and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:1–3, ESV)

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.” (Acts 16:5, ESV)

Investing Spiritual Gifts as Gold

The early Church did not simply wait passively; they harnessed the power of the Spirit to multiply what Christ had entrusted to them. They understood that the gifts were spiritual capital—like the bags of gold in the parable.

Peter provides a clear example of this: when he encountered the lame man at the temple gate, he boldly declared: *“Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” (Acts 3:6, KJV)*

Peter knew the gold he carried—and he refused to bury it or keep it to himself. Instead, he called the man to look at him. By investing this spiritual gold, the result was profound:

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the temple gate... And as the man entered the temple, walking and leaping, the people were filled with awe and glorified God.” (Acts 3:8–10, KJV)

The investment of spiritual gifts produced a massive return—souls were added to the kingdom and the influence of God’s kingdom expanded.

Spiritual gifts are gold, and like the parable teaches, they must be actively used. Faithfulness requires that we identify, exercise, and multiply what God has entrusted to us, producing fruit that endures for His glory.

The Judgement of the servants

The judgment of Christ is a day of reckoning, a trial, or a tribunal where every believer will give account for what has been entrusted to them. The parables of the bags of gold and talents illustrate this clearly: there was a time to work, a time to steward, and a time to give account (Matthew 25:14–30).

The servants were given equal opportunity. What mattered was what they did with their time. Similarly, in the Christian life, every moment we are alive is an opportunity to invest in what God has entrusted to us.

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15–16, KJV)

The word redeeming the time means to make the most of every opportunity, to invest every moment, every gift, every opportunity wisely for the kingdom of God. Time is a sacred resource, given by God, that can produce fruit lasting into eternity.

Idleness—refusing to act faithfully with what has been entrusted—is condemned. The servant who buried his bag of gold represents the believer who fails to act with diligence:

“But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his master’s money. And after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.” (Matthew 25:18–19, ESV)

This servant excused himself, calling the master “wicked,” and did nothing though had equal time with others. It was after a long time that the master returned but the idle servant did nothing during that time. ***“All believers are either making or marring a destiny. Winning or losing a crown. Time becomes the testing ground of eternity”.***

Adoniram Judson said:

A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity... the same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever... each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny... How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness... ! It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked."

To Whom much is given

“To whom much is given, of him much will be required, and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:48, ESV)

Those who labored faithfully received more: more responsibility, more trust, more reward. Those who were idle or self-serving received rebuke and shame. Jesus makes this principle clear: the Christian life is one of action, not passivity. What we do with the spiritual gifts, opportunities, and time given to us will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Church, the individual believer, and all who claim His name will be held accountable:

“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12, KJV)

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1, KJV)

Therefore, we are called to diligent, faithful stewardship:

- Faithful with time, ensuring each day is invested for kingdom purposes.
- Faithful with gifts, resources, and opportunities entrusted by God.
- Faithful with influence and relationships, multiplying them for eternal impact.

The judgment is not about condemnation for the believer, but about evaluation, reward, and commendation. The master in the parables represents Christ, who sees our walk, our labor, and our diligence, and on that day, the faithfulness of our lives will be revealed:

The Joy of the Master

“...Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21, ESV)

What does He mean by the joy of the master? He didn't see come and enjoy or now enter into a life of joy. It wasn't about the joy of the servant but the master. It is a shared delight in the master's accomplishment. Joy is often accompanied with feasting and celebration. So, the master has thrown a party for His success and joy but the stewards are invited to celebrate with Him. The thought of entering into the joy of the Master is the believer's true goal. It is not about our personal pleasure or recognition. Our goal is not simply to rejoice at what we do or to gain the approval of men. The world celebrates position, influence, and applause, but Christianity calls us to please God, not men (Galatians 1:10).

Jesus exemplified this on the cross. Though mocked, opposed, and pierced, He endured the suffering for the joy set before Him (Hebrews

12:2). The joy was not His comfort or accolades from men, but the joy of the Father and the joy of redemption.

Similarly, as believers, we are called to live for the joy of the Master. Every day of service, labor, and stewardship should be aimed at pleasing Christ, not impressing men (Colossians 3:23–24). Even when the world criticizes or fails to recognize our efforts, our ultimate evaluation is not human approval, but God’s commendation (1 Corinthians 4:5).

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21, ESV)

This joy is the true reward of faithful stewardship. It guides our actions and priorities, ensuring that our gifts, resources, time, and influence are invested in what matters eternally. Our satisfaction and fulfillment are found in bringing joy to the Master, not in worldly applause or fleeting honors (Romans 14:18).

Thus, the believer’s goal is to live in a way that multiplies value for God’s kingdom, pleases Him in every act of faithfulness, and produces eternal impact, culminating in the joy of the Master (Philippians 2:13). When we live for His joy, we experience true satisfaction, even amidst earthly trials. His joy is His eternal smile, His happiness, His satisfaction on our return of His investment that we will share in the coming age – ***He shall see the travail of His Soul and shall be satisfied (Is 53:11).***

Canadian Missionary J. Goforth gives a beautiful illustration that captures sharing the joy of the master: "When he was fifteen years of age his father put him in charge of their second farm, which was twenty miles from the home farm. "Work hard," said his father. "At harvest I'll return and inspect." In later years Goforth stirred many an audience as he told of his arduous labors that summer, of his father's return in the fall and of how his heart thrilled when his father, after inspecting the fields of beautiful waving grain, turned to him and smiled. "That smile," he would say, "was all the reward I wanted. I knew my father was pleased. So will

it be, dear Christians, if we are faithful to the trust our Heavenly Father has given us. His smile of approval will be our blessed reward."

The Athlete's Race (1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

Paul gives us another picture of the judgment seat: the image of the athlete. He draws from what his Corinthian audience knew very well—the Games (the Isthmian Games, similar to the Olympics). He says:

*"Do you not know that in a race (**stadion**) all the runners (**trechontes**) run, but only one receives the prize (**brabeion**)? So run that you may obtain it."* (1 Cor. 9:24)

The word **stadion** refers to a 600-foot racecourse, the very stadium where the contests took place. Everyone in the race is running, exerting effort, making progress, but not everyone wins the prize.

The prize (**brabeion**) was the award given by the **brabeus**—the official judge. In the Games, the victor alone received the crown (**stephanos**), a wreath of pine or laurel. Paul reminds us: effort is not enough. Not all who run will win the prize.

In verse 25, he continues:

*"Every athlete (**agonizomenos**—one who strives, contends, agonizes) exercises self-control (**enkrateuetai**) in all things. They do it to receive a perishable crown (**stephanos**), but we an imperishable."*

Here Paul gives the secret:

- ❖ The real fight begins before the stadium. They struggle, train, and discipline themselves for years before the public contest. **Enkrateuetai** means exercising mastery over oneself, having power over one's own desires, disciplining the body. The first victory is in the inner life, in the secret before the open. Without mastery in private, there can be no victory in public.

So Paul concludes:

*“I therefore run (**trechō**) not aimlessly; I box (**pukteuō**) not as one beating the air. But I discipline (**hypōpiazō**—literally, to strike under the eye, to beat black-and-blue) my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (**adokimos**).”* (vv. 26–27)

The warning is sharp: even the herald, who was the announcer at the Games, who proclaim the names of the athletes, who called the competitors into the stadium and announces the winners at the end could be disqualified if he broke the rules. This calls for a sober reflection for all who preach and teach. Paul, the herald of the gospel, is aware that without self-discipline and faithfulness, he too could be disqualified from the reward.

A Caveat to Leaders:

James 3:1 warns us: *“Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”* Another translation calls them “masters.” Why? Because teachers and leaders carry greater influence. Their words shape lives. Their responsibility is heavier. Their knowledge must be deeper before they can teach, and therefore the measure of accountability is higher. It is the same principle our Lord spoke: *“To whom much is given, much will be required.”* And again, *“The servant who knows his master’s will and does not do it will be beaten with many stripes”* (Luke 12:47–48).

Paul understood this. Preaching is not wrong; in fact, it is a noble calling. But Paul said, *“I discipline my body and bring it under subjection, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified”* (1 Cor. 9:27). He knew the danger: the herald who announces the games could himself be disqualified if he breaks the rules. That is a sober warning for every preacher and teacher. Just like the Referees could also be disqualified when he doesn’t follow the rules of the games, he is well aware of.

Therefore, James counsels us: do not all desire to be teachers, or critics, or those who always speak, for every word and every teaching will be

judged. This is weighty. Even in our time, when we use our voices on social media, in the church, or among friends, we must remember the responsibility that comes with influencing others.

But James is not telling us to run from responsibility. If God has called you, do not hide like the idle servant who buried his talent. Instead, take up the call **soberly**. Think carefully about the responsibility, and follow the pattern of the apostle Paul. As a preacher, as a writer, as a teacher, I must discipline myself. I must pay attention to my inner life before my public ministry. Daily prayers, bible reading and meditations, practicing the word, nourishing my soul in the truth, fellowshiping with other saints to receive:

1. We Need Constant Communion personally and cooperatively (Amos 4:12)
2. We Need Continual Confession, i.e., acknowledging our fault and not denying (1 Jn 1:9)
3. We Need Clear Consciences and constant renewing of the i.e., not violating our conscience but nurturing our hearts by the truth (Beware of what you feed your minds with (Acts 24:16).

I must keep exerting force on myself, training myself in godliness, tending first to the secret world of my heart. For the secret life of a minister is greater than the public one.

Pauline Secret

Paul gives us a secret. Before the **agonizomai** on the field (the word means “**to wrestle, to fight**”), something must have already happened. It’s not first the training that counts, but the discipline before the training ever shows. When Paul says, “everyone who strives for mastery,” that’s what is seen in public—the exertion, the contest, the visible struggle. But before a man can gain mastery on the field, his life must already be regimented in private.

This is the picture Paul himself paints. He relinquished his rights over legitimate material gains, even good ones he could have enjoyed. At certain points, he had to labor with his own hands. He chose not to have a wife. He traveled, preached the gospel, and became a servant to all so that he might win souls. Paul was saying that his life was one of regimented discipline—even in legitimate things—because his eyes were on something greater. He became all things to all men so that some might be saved. (1Cor 9:1-24).

This is the picture of the believer: anyone who desires to receive rewards from the Lord must go beyond what is merely legitimate. The question is not only “what is sinful?” but also, “what extra effort can I pay attention to, to win the prize?” The Christian race is not a competition against others—it is that there is a prize for every one of us. Yet not everyone who runs receives that prize. Why? Because this race calls for a regimented, disciplined life. Some fall along the way. Some do not endure to the end.

In the races of the world, people strive for a corruptible crown—a wreath that withers, a glory that perishes. But we run for an incorruptible crown, one that never fades. So Paul says in verse 26: “I therefore so run...” I exert effort, I push on. But not uncertainly—not aimlessly, not like one beating the air. I run with a goal in view, with the prize before my eyes. That’s the call to every believer: to live with eternity in mind, to remember the judgment seat of Christ, to live with the prize in view. I am not just running for running’s sake. I know there is a Judge waiting. I know I must live by His will and His pattern. So Paul continues: “*I fight, not as one who beats the air.*” I am not aimless, not wasting effort, not exhausting myself in empty agonizing. My heart is set on the victor’s crown, on what the Lord Himself has for me.

So what do I do? “*I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.*” What does that mean? It means I dominate my body. I do not allow my body to rule me. The Greek paints the picture of striking under the eye until it bruises—disciplining the body, enslaving its passions. Paul is

saying, *"My body is my slave, so that I might win the prize."* If a man will win, he must not indulge the body in everything it craves. It is a call to discipline. It is a call to self-denial.

Jesus Himself said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." (Luke 9:23). The Christian life is one of self-denial, not of indulgence. It is not giving our flesh everything it wants, but walking in fervency, in continuity, in the right pattern.

Leonard Ravenhill has some break taking words of wisdom:

Take a look at the dying thief. Oh, he'll be in heaven all right because Jesus said he would - but he wasted his life. Then look at John Wesley for example. He was saved soundly when he was 35 years of age, and he served the Lord for the next 53 years. You couldn't think that the dying thief, a man who got in at the last tick of the clock, is going to have the same reward as John Wesley, could you? Wesley made an awful lot of money. Do you know what he did with it? He built orphanages and churches. He printed Bibles and hymn books. There was no time wasted in his life. He was methodical and systematic. He went to dinner with the greatest man in English literature and the man said, "Now you've finished dinner, let's fold our legs under the table and have a nice time of conversation." Wesley said, "I'm sorry, I have to go." "But it's not yet nine o'clock, why are you going?" Wesley said, "I have an appointment in the morning at four o'clock." "At four o'clock tomorrow morning?" "Every morning of my life," he said. "With whom?" "With God." He disciplined his life. He disciplined his body in eating. He disciplined his hand in his pocket. He'll stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ...an awesome prospect for any of us. "We ought to live every day as though we've come out of another world into this world - but with the power of that world still upon us. We should live and speak and move in that power, and have our whole being in Jesus Christ!"

So Paul says: *"I keep under my body, lest while I preach to others, I myself become a castaway."* Preaching is like running, like fighting. But it must be done in such a way that wins the prize. It is possible to preach,

to labor, to witness, and yet be disqualified. It is possible to be busy with Christian activities—giving, organizing programs, start an organization, running discipleship classes, making content, even sacrificial acts—and yet miss the goal. Paul’s eyes were on the prize. His motive was not activity but reward. He longed to please Christ and win the victor’s crown.

The word “**cast-away**” means to be disqualified, unapproved, or rejected after testing. In the athletic games of Paul’s time, competitors could be disqualified if they broke the rules. Paul borrows that picture to warn believers: it is possible to run, to exert effort, to even preach—and yet fail the test. That is why he lived as he did.

How not to be disqualified:

The New Testament shows a vivid picture of the Christian life as a race and we can glean from those pictures how not to be disqualified:

1. To run successfully, a believer must first run lawfully.

The Christian race is not free-for-all; it has rules, boundaries, and a course set by God. Just as an athlete in a stadium must stay within the track, wear the proper attire, and follow the regulations of the competition, so must a believer adhere to God’s Word and His principles. One can exert great effort, but if done outside of God’s will, it leads to disqualification. As 2 Timothy 2:5 warns:

“An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”
(ESV)

Running lawfully requires obedience to God’s revealed instructions—the “manual” of the Christian life – the Bible. This includes living according to the standards of Scripture, following God’s pattern, and faithfully stewarding what has been entrusted to us. Disregarding the rule, ignoring God’s commands, or taking shortcuts —risks being disqualified, no matter the effort expended. We cannot afford to joke with understanding and applying the truths of the Bible in our daily lives. You can run in vain when your life doesn’t align with God’s revealed will.

2. Believers must run with endurance.

Hebrews 12:1–2: *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (ESV)

Endurance is the ability to persist under pressure for the long haul. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Many start the race, but only those who remain disciplined, faithful, and diligent until the end will obtain the incorruptible prize. Galatians 6:9 *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”* (ESV)

Sin, distraction, and misplaced attachments can hinder endurance. Even seemingly legitimate pursuits can drain spiritual stamina if they divert focus from God’s call. Fleshly desires, unholy habits, and worldly attachments waste opportunities, dull sensitivity to God’s Spirit, and diminish the fruitfulness of our labor.

Endurance requires a life of self-discipline, self-denial, and intentional obedience. Discipline here is key. Paul emphasizes that mastery begins before the public exertion—it begins in the secret, in the personal control of desires, appetites, and passions. The first fight is internal; the outward race is merely the arena where that internal discipline is revealed. A believer’s goal is not merely activity, service, or busyness, but faithful service that earns the victor’s crown, the eternal reward laid up at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

3. Forgetting what lies behind.

A man who will win must not dwell on the past, whether failure or even past success. As Paul wrote:

“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13–14, NIV)

The past is not the prize. An athlete who lost many races before can still win today if he focuses on the present race. Dwelling on the past—mistakes, failures, or even successes—can hinder present opportunity. It is often a distraction. As Leonard Ravenhill said, “The opportunity of a lifetime is seized in the life of the opportunity.” Now is the time to redeem the moment. This is your time oh young man, it is your hour! This is your day, it is your day time, PRESS!

Paul emphasizes the need for an eternal mindset, focused on what God has promised, what lies ahead, and the crown to be awarded. This is a daily pursuit, a continual striving toward what matters most: God’s calling and the prize of heaven. He was heavenward on his earth journey! What a man to emulate! Now, I will be quoting something a bit lengthy **by Art Katz on this**, it is thought provoking and soul inciting:

“We need to adjust our whole mind-set and attitude. We may ‘believe’ in eternity, but we have agreed with the world that it does not become relevant until after this life. In other words, it becomes applicable when this life has ended. To have this attitude guarantees we will not be found disagreeable or controversial to the world. The world wants to relegate eternity to a future consideration that has no present application. Eternity is, however, not another kind of time frame; it is not merely endless time or a quantitative thing, but profoundly and foremost a qualitative thing. That qualitative thing is available now— it is eternity now. When we begin to see all our moments set in the context of eternity, we will bring to those moments an intensity, a care, a solemnity, and a seriousness that we would not otherwise have had. Heaven is reality, and it is coming down to earth. It is that new City whose Founder and Builder is God, and God has called us to the apostolic task of bringing eternity into time...

The book of Revelation begins by John speaking of the things that shall shortly come to pass. There is a certain immediacy and urgency in his apostolic writing, and yet it is almost two thousand years later, and it has not yet happened. He was not deceived, but rather writing and speaking from a mindset that God intends characteristically to be true of saints in every generation. We need to develop a sense for the things that are ‘at hand,’ the things that are imminent and about to come into time, for example, the appearing of the Lord, the establishing of His kingdom...

The foundation of the apostolic mindset, however, is a true apprehension of the things that are eternal, not in anticipation of a future enjoyment, but of a present appropriation, and that is what makes the church peculiar. We have no idea how important the subject of eternity is. To lose the meaning of this word is to lose everything, and it will condemn the church to being mundane and ordinary, institutional and mechanical, a weariness of the flesh, instead of a joy and a power. In other words, the absence of eternity in the consciousness of the church disfigures and nullifies it as being church. We are going to have to contend for this reality, because the world is not hospitable to it. Paul not only found this eternal dimension, he also dwelt in it, and yet that did not condemn him to irrelevancy. On the contrary, it made him all the more relevant, and so will it make us also.”

4. Fighting to Finish

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7–8, ESV)

Notice Paul’s language: fought, finished, kept the faith. The race is not passive; it is a fight. Not for quitters, not for lily-livered, not for the timid or the chicken-hearted. It’s for men empowered by the Holy Spirit. A good fight continues to the finish line. To win the crown, one must persist, fight, and press onward. Every believer is called to this: to fight to the

end, to finish well, and to remain faithful to the very goal God has set before us. This involves several dimensions:

- **Contend for the Faith** – Believers are called to struggle to uphold truth. Jude exhorts:

“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 1:3, ESV). Faith is not passive; it requires effort and vigilance.

- **Resist the Devil** – Our fight involves standing firm against the schemes of the enemy. Paul teaches:

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:11–12, ESV)

- **Wrestle in Prayer** – Spiritual exertion also involves persistent, fervent prayer:

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.” (Colossians 4:12, ESV)

The Building Imagery

Corinthians 3:8–15 (KJV): *“Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s*

husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Paul gave us an excellent building imagery of the judgment seat of Christ here. The context was that some people in Corinth were praising one minister above another (1 Corinthians 3:4–7). Some said, *"I am of Paul,"* others, *"I am of Apollos."* Paul corrects them, saying that really, no one is better than the other—"every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (v. 8).

Before you exalt people, before you say this one is a better preacher, this one is a more prayerful Christian, this one is more excellent, Paul reminds us: that is not the focus. We have many ways of comparing ourselves with others, or comparing others with others. But Paul says comparison itself is carnal (1 Corinthians 3:3). It is fleshly to exalt one person above another.

Instead, what matters is that there is a reward coming from the Lord, not from men. The judgment seat of Christ is not about human applause. It is God Himself who will reward the labourers. So Paul calls himself and Apollos labourers together with God (v. 9). He then shifts the imagery and calls himself a wise master builder—a skilled architect who laid the foundation. That foundation is Jesus Christ (v. 11).

So, we don't all have the same responsibilities. Paul had the grace of a wise master builder. Foundational work is hidden but essential. Some recent believers in Corinthians will likely not even know Paul, but would

only know Apollos. That doesn't matter. The labourer's goal is not to be known but to do their work. Different roles, same purpose. Yet, all labourers aim to please God, to get His Applause.

So Paul noted that "Every other person who builds must take heed how he builds upon it". Notice, Paul did not just say "build", he said "take heed how you build". The Greek word for take heed (blepō) carries the sense of paying close attention, beware, looking critically, examining carefully. So the emphasis is not on just doing work, but on the quality of the work and the quality of the materials.

Paul lists two categories of building material:

1. Gold, silver, precious stones – materials of lasting value, meaning eternal.
2. Wood, hay, stubble – materials of no lasting value.

Here, three are of quality; three are without quality. So every man's work will be tested—not by quantity, but by quality. We must also understand the Corinthian background. Earlier, Paul had already addressed their obsession with human wisdom, rhetoric, and worldly philosophies (1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 2:1–5). Some were building with man's wisdom—human ideologies, secularism, enticing words, and showmanship. Knowledge was puffing them up like a doughnut or the Nigerian puff puff. These materials used in the church are like wood, hay, and stubble. They elevate human pride, they puff up, they look impressive, but when pressed, they burst like a balloon—nothing but emptiness.

1 Corinthians 3:18-20: "Let no man deceive himself". If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

On the other hand, gold, silver, and precious stones represent what is of eternal value:

I. Truth that is Christ-centered and cross-centered (1 Corinthians 2:2).

II. Ministry built on God's own standard, the leading of the spirit and gospel-fitting methods (There are a lot of gospel compromising methods).

III. Work invested in God's people—the true temple, the Church (1 Corinthians 3:16).

So Paul warns: *“Be careful how you build”*. Not everything called ministry is approved by heaven. Not everything that impresses men will survive eternity. Be eternity conscious, don't build your life on human applause or personal thrills of your success. That's too cheap, too vain, too spurious a thrill, they are ejaculatory thrills that never last! **Go for the gold! Why not, if not? You are inexcusable, oh man!**

Leonard Ravenhil view of the golden life: *“What is gold a sign of? I believe it's a sign of our devotion to God. If I could have a small melting pot here, I'd put your \$10,000 worth of gold in it and melt it down. What happens when you burn gold? Nothing! It just changes from solid to liquid, but you don't reduce it. Can you see all the saints standing in heaven? And there's Leonard Ravenhill - standing before Christ whose eyes are filled with holiness. The whole place is breathing holiness. There in the presence and the majesty of an awesome God, the record of my poor life is read before all the saints of all the ages. And He puts the fire to my devotional life. Am I just a good showman? I sure like to preach because God called me to preach. I don't care how I preach, and I don't care whether you believe me either. I'm not responsible for that. I preach out of my heart all I believe, and I'd die for it. But say, am I just a showman? What's my secret life like?*

I've said it many times and I'll say it again - no man is greater than his prayer life. I don't care how big his organization is. Let me live with a man awhile and share his prayer life, and I'll tell you how tall I think he is, or how majestic I think he is in God. What's your devotional life like right now? Would you like Gabriel to hand down the book of your

devotional life for the last month so it could be read out loud at church this Sunday? The gold is going to be tried through our devotional life.”

So, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:13–15: *“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” (KJV)*

It seems as though Paul is saying: “let everybody keep building. There will come a time of testing when the quality of the material is examined. It’s like a man who gave out his house as a contract to labourers, calling someone to build, then later returning to check exactly what the builder has done.

He says, *“Every man’s work shall be made manifest.”* The word manifest speaks of light, of revelation. That is one of the aspects of the judgment—the judgment of Christ comes with manifestation. We cannot see everything now. To judge by outward appearance or by quantity of work is to misjudge. It’s not about numbers. Sometimes we make it look like God judges by crowds, achievements, or numerical ways of measuring success—but that is not how God judges.

On the day of judgment, every man’s work will be revealed. There is a manifestation, a revealing. “For the day shall declare it”—the day is a picture of light, like the sun coming to show every man’s work as God sees it. This is not as men see it now. The judgment of Christ sees as God sees—not as humans say, “Paul is nice, Peter is good, this person is right.”

The day will come to test the work because it “shall be revealed by fire.” What brings this manifestation? Fire. Fire reveals the quality of the material. The fire tests every man’s work—its sort, its quality, its nature. The standard of God’s evaluation is fire—His holiness, His justice, His perfect wisdom.

Immediately, when you hear “fire”, think about the quality of the material you are presenting. A man who knows his work will be judged by fire must examine what he is building. You cannot expect to be judged by fire and bring wood, hay, or stubble, because fire will consume them.

Many believers do not understand the measure of God’s judgment. We are so earthly-minded that we lose sight of eternity, the weight of God’s justice, and how He sees and evaluates everything.

The fire reveals eternal reality. A building of gold and silver will shine and sparkle under fire—from crown to top. A building of wood, hay, or stubble will burn completely. That is the outcome of human works, human philosophies, and wrong motives. The Corinthians were building on stubble—wrong motives, wrong mindset, human philosophies, human pride, denominationalism, individualism! Such a self-centered community with mighty heavens investment but little profit for the master.

So, what is the fire checking? Every man’s work—its quality, character, intrinsic value, and worth. This is God testing the character of our work. If a man’s work abides the fire, he will receive reward. There will be a final analysis, a checking of our life, ministry, and labor. Whether good or bad, Spirit-inspired or flesh-inspired, it will be tested.

There is an old story of a man who was entrusted with a building project. Someone overseas sent him the money to build a fine house. But out of greed, the man cut corners, used cheaper materials, and pocketed much of the money for himself. When the owner returned, he inspected the building, handed the man the keys, and said, *“This house is yours. I built it for you.”* The man was struck with deep regret. If only he had known that he was building for himself, he would have used the best materials and invested everything with care.

This is a picture of our labor before Christ. Paul says, *“Each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what sort of work each one has done”* (1 Cor. 3:13). Our building, our ministry, our words, our teaching

will be tested. Some will stand like gold, silver, and precious stones; others will burn away like wood, hay, and stubble.

The truth is sobering: our labor in the Lord is not for ourselves, yet in the end, the reward—or the loss—returns to us. Eternity will tell the worth of every hidden choice, every motive, and every word spoken. And that is why James warns us not all should desire to teach, and Paul disciplines himself with such severity. Because when the keys are handed back on that Day, every minister will dwell in the house he has built.

...Saved; yet so as by fire!

And 1 Corinthians 3:15 says: *“If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be **saved; yet so as by fire.**”* (KJV)

If the work does not endure, the man suffers loss—not of salvation, but of reward. The foundation, Christ, remains. But what we build upon Him will be tested by fire, and only the materials of eternal value—gold, silver, and precious stones—will remain.

We are sure of our eternal salvation in Christ, for *“by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9). Salvation is a gift. We have been saved, our sins forgiven, and we no longer stand under condemnation (Romans 8:1). We have been justified before the Judge of heaven and earth. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are certain of this: He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Christ has become our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

So, standing before the judgment seat is not about trying to earn salvation, for we could never earn it. Christ earned it for us and gave it to us as a gift. He was our substitute in His atonement, and through faith we stand justified in the courts of the universe, with no record of wrong against us (Romans 3:24–26).

The judgment seat of Christ is not for unbelievers. Those whose names are not written in the book of life will face the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11–15). The judgment seat of Christ, however, is for believers—for reward, honor, and accountability. Yet, even now Christ says, “I know your works” (Revelation 2–3). To every one of the seven churches, He repeated this. He is conscious of our works. He recognizes faithfulness, compromise, perseverance, and slackness. In Revelation 2–3, He was honest with the churches—convicting, rebuking, commending. John saw Him clothed in a glorified robe, with eyes like a flame of fire (Revelation 1:13–14)—a picture of what is to come when He evaluates the church. *When I stand before Him and check my works by the fire in His eyes, I desire to be faithful! Help me, Lord!*

This is a revelation of what is to come, and if we have ears to hear, we must hear His voice even today. The Spirit judges, convicts, and corrects us. Yes, we are fully accepted and beloved in Christ. Yes, our identity is secure. But we must not become negligent, thinking that because salvation is a gift, there is no reward. That is not true! That is not true! That is not true! God sees your works!

We will stand before Jesus Christ. A person could labor all his life and yet find that his works were not pleasing to God—that is the fear. And this is not just about preaching or pastoring. No! It is about a life wholly given to God. Paul reminded servants in Ephesians and Colossians that their work must be done “as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance” (Colossians 3:23–24; cf. Ephesians 6:7–8). This changes our view of everyday work. I can work in my workplace in such a way that Christ will reward me, even if my earthly masters never praise me. Wow! What a transformed view of work.

Jesus spoke of laying up treasures in heaven by how we use money on earth (Matthew 6:19–21). Paul said we can lay a foundation for the world to come even through ordinary daily endeavors—hospitality, generosity, even giving a cup of cold water in His name (Matthew 10:42). Your

family life, your relationships, your faithfulness in little things—all can set a foundation for something eternal. Abraham and Sarah, by faith, longed for a city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:9–10).

But a man can stand before the judgment seat of Christ and have nothing to show—know nothing, see nothing to present—though he has done so much with his earthly life. That is the pain of a “success-driven” life measured only by human standards: houses, possessions, degrees, awards, titles, whether secular or religious. These things are stumbling blocks, not eternal foundations. They are temporal, they will not last.

Paul says, **“If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”** (1 Corinthians 3:15). Imagine a man escaping from a burning house—he survives, but all his possessions are gone. He is saved, but everything else is lost. Many believers will find that half—or even all—they did in life cannot stand the test of eternity, because it was lived only for earth.

But the one who considers eternity lives to build with materials that the fire cannot consume—works of eternal value. That way, he will not be ashamed at Christ’s coming (1 John 2:28). Yet, tragically, many will be ashamed, because though they are saved, their works will not endure.

1 John 2:28 *“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming”*.

Alfred Gibbs narrated this story:

The following story, culled from a current magazine, will serve to illustrate the menace of this subtle temptation to which all preachers are susceptible. It is entitled, A Worker’s Dream. I sat down in an armchair, wearied with my work. My toil had been severe and protracted. Many were seeking Christ, and many had found Him. As for myself, I was joyous in my work. My brethren were united. My sermons and exhortations were evidently telling on my hearers. My church was

crowded. Tired with my work, I soon lost myself in a sort of half-forgetful state. Suddenly a stranger entered the room, without any preliminary “tap” or “Come in.” He carried about his person measures, chemical agents and implements, which gave him a very strange appearance. The stranger came toward me and, extending his hand said, “How is your zeal?” I supposed that the query was to be for my health, but was pleased to hear his final words.

I was quite well pleased with my zeal, and doubted not that the stranger would smile when he should know its proportions. Instantly I conceived of it as physical quantity and putting my hand into my bosom, brought it forth and presented it to him for inspection. He took it and, placing it in his scale, weighed it carefully. I heard him say, “One hundred pounds!” I could scarcely suppress an audible note of satisfaction; but I caught his earnest look as he noted down the weight, and I saw at once that he had drawn no final conclusion, but was intent on pushing his investigation.

He broke the mass to atoms, put it into his crucible, and put the crucible into the fire. When the mass was fused he took it out, and set it to cool. It congealed in cooling, and when turned out on the hearth, exhibited a series of layers or strata, which all, at the touch of the hammer, fell apart, and were severally tested and weighed, the stranger making minute notes as the process went on. When he had finished, he presented the notes to me, and gave a look of mingled sorrow and compassion, as he left the room without a word, except “*May God save you!*” The “notes” read as follows:

Analysis of the Zeal of Junius, a Candidate for a Crown of Glory:

Trait / Quality	Parts	Percentage	Material Symbolism
Bigotry	10	10%	Wood / Stubble
Personal Ambition	23	23%	Wood / Stubble
Love of Praise	19	19%	Wood / Stubble
Pride of Denomination	15	15%	Wood / Stubble
Pride of Talent	14	14%	Wood / Stubble
Love of Authority	12	12%	Wood / Stubble
Love to God	4	4%	Gold / Precious
Love to Man	3	3%	Gold / Precious
Total	100	100%	—

He went on:

I had become troubled at the peculiar manner of the stranger, and especially at his parting look and words; but when I looked at the figures, my heart sank as lead within me. I made a mental effort to dispute the correctness of the record, but I was startled into a more honest mood by an audible sigh from the stranger (who had paused in the hall). I cried out, “Lord save me!” and knelt down at my chair, with the paper in my

hand and my eyes fixed upon it. At once it became a mirror, and I saw my heart reflected in it. The record was true!...I saw it, I felt it, I confessed it, I deplored it, and I besought God to save me from myself with many tears. Then, with a loud cry of anguish I awoke. **I had once prayed to be saved from hell, but prayer to be saved from myself now was immeasurably more fervent and distressful. I did not rest until I had judged, confessed and turned from the shameful thing, and knew His restoring grace. When the toils of my pilgrimage shall be at an end I shall kneel in heaven at the foot of the divine Alchemist and bless Him for the revelations of that day. Let us not wait until the judgment seat of Christ to have our zeal analyzed. "If we would judge ourselves, we should not bejudged" (1 Cor. 3:9-15; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 11:31). The Scriptural injunction is this, "Let every man prove [scrutinize] his own work" (Gal. 6:4).**

May I Not Be Put to Shame

May I not be put to shame,
At Your coming, when You honour the most unexpected—
Even the undignified by men's standard,
The unknown,
The unpopular,
The unskillful,
The uneducated.
May I not be put to shame.

When many who never stood on pulpits,
When many who could not read or write
Wear the badge of honour,
Hear your commendation,
When they earn the Saviour's smile—
May I not see You displeased,
May I not see Your tears,
And say, "Is this all My worth before you?"

Ah! May it not be that my cowardice,
My pleasure,
My compromise,

My laziness,
My procrastination—
Follow me to that seat!
O Lord, save me now!
Not tomorrow, save me now!
Have mercy.

I will be truthful with myself and sincere.
I will be honest with You.
Search me.
Show me—me!
Now, not then!

May I not be put to shame,
When You measure my works and nothing stands.
Ah, shame!
Let me take the shame now, before men.
Let me take the place of no reputation before them.
Let me embrace dishonour—
Yes, even ridicule and disgrace.

Let my name and work be unknown to men.
Let my works not earn man's praise or applause.
But Lord, let me hear You say, "Well done."
Let me hear You say, "All is of gold."
Let me hear You say, "Enter into My joy!"
Let me not be ashamed.

The Hope and Crown of Righteousness

As I round off this booklet, I want to return to a central truth that ties together all the images I have shared. I spoke about the image of the builder in *1 Corinthians 3*—that every man's work will be tested. I also gave the image of the athlete in *1 Corinthians 9*, striving according to the rules so as not to be disqualified. And I drew from the parables of the talents, the servant-master relationship in stewardship. All of these point us to the same reality: the judgment seat of Christ.

Now, let me close with what Scripture calls the *hope of righteousness*. Now, let me close with what Scripture calls the *hope of righteousness*. In *Galatians 5:5*, Paul writes:

“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.” (*Galatians 5:5, ESV*)

And in his last letter, Paul also spoke about the *crown of righteousness*. He declared:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (*2 Timothy 4:8, ESV*)

Yes, we have already been justified by faith, and that has secured our identity in Christ. That is unshakable. Christ has imputed His righteousness to us, and God now sees us as accepted in the Beloved. We stand forgiven, clothed in the gift of righteousness by faith. This is the first and deepest motivation for our labor: we do not work for the applause of men, nor for the empty accolades of social media, nor for the fleeting grandeur of a success-driven society that measures worth by money, possessions, or fame. We work from the security of already being approved by God in Christ Jesus. That is enough.

But there is more. Beyond our justification, there is also the promise of reward. At the judgment seat, the works of the justified will be tested, and there will be a crown of righteousness. This crown does not mean pardon from sin—that has already been secured by the cross. Rather, it is the public vindication of our labors in Christ. It is God Himself saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

That is why Paul called it the *hope of righteousness*—the future joy of hearing the Savior’s smile in His words. And this motivates us. We live in the “already but not yet.” Already justified, but not yet crowned. Already secure, but still waiting for the righteous Judge to reward every hidden act of faithfulness.

This perspective is a powerful cure for the crisis of self-esteem that plagues so many today. People measure themselves against others—their

work, their possessions, their popularity—and feel small or insignificant. But the believer’s identity is rooted, first, in justification by faith, and second, in the sure hope that Christ Himself will honor even the smallest service done for His name. He said that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not lose its reward. That is true self-esteem: not self-occupation, but Christ-occupation.

As Tim Keller once put it, the secret is *self-forgetfulness*. True humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less—and being preoccupied with Christ. The judgment seat teaches us this. It lifts our eyes away from the applause of men and fixes them on the applause of heaven. It teaches us to live for the joy of our Savior’s smile.

And this is the greatest way to live: to know that every hidden act of faith, every sacrifice, every labor of love, is noticed by Him who is righteous. The book of Hebrews reminds us, For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (Heb 6:10 KJV). Because He is righteous, He will surely reward.

So we live between two realities: already justified, and still waiting for the crown of righteousness. Already accepted, and still longing for His “Well done.” This is what makes our lives truly significant. Not the fleeting applause of men, but the eternal joy of the Savior’s commendation.

That is the motivation of my own heart: to be all he has called me to be, to do all he has made me to do, and to hear well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord. Amen! What He has asked me to do is to bring Him joy, and to know that one day He will recognize it. That is the greatest honor. That is the hope that will never fail.

Self-Esteem in Light of Christ: *Note built on Keller’s book on self-forgetfulness*

1. The Human Heart and the Search for Worth

Søren Kierkegaard, in his classic work *Sickness Unto Death*, observes that “it is the normal state of the human heart to try to build its identity

around something besides God.” Spiritual pride is the illusion that we are competent to run our own lives, achieve our own sense of self-worth, and find a purpose big enough to give meaning to life without God. The human ego, Kierkegaard argues, is naturally built on anything that is not God, constantly searching for significance, specialness, and a purpose, only to find that whatever fills the space intended for God is too small—it rattles and leaves emptiness.

C.S. Lewis reinforces this insight in his chapter on pride in *Mere Christianity*:

“Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next person”. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking, there would be nothing to be proud about.”

Pride, in essence, is competitive; it is empty, painful, busy, and fragile. The pursuit of self-esteem outside of God’s verdict is a daily courtroom trial where every act, word, and thought becomes evidence—either for our justification or condemnation.

2. The Courtroom of Daily Life

Timothy Keller, in *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, explains this vividly:

“Every single day, we are in the courtroom. Every single day, we are on trial... Some days we feel we are winning the trial and other days we feel we are losing it.”

Our identity, if tethered to human approval, is perpetually fragile. In a world dominated by social media, career achievements, and public visibility, believers are constantly tempted to “show themselves,” echoing the words of Jesus’ brothers in John 7:3–4: “Leave here and go

to Judea, so that your disciples may see the works you do. No one who wants to become known acts in secret.”

But Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 4:3–4 offer freedom from this relentless pressure: “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.”

Here is the secret of gospel-centered self-esteem: the trial is over for the believer. The ultimate verdict is already in. Paul knows that neither human praise nor human judgment matters ultimately. Even his own self-assessment cannot justify him. Only the Lord’s opinion counts.

3. Gospel-Humility and True Self-Esteem

The essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of oneself, nor thinking less of oneself—it is thinking of oneself less. Keller describes this as self-forgetfulness: a life no longer preoccupied with proving worth to others or to oneself.

“The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”

True self-esteem, therefore, is not about high self-worth or low self-worth. It is rooted in being filled with Christ rather than puffed up with self. It is independent of worldly comparison, public recognition, or internal self-judgment.

4. The Judgment Seat of Christ and Identity in God

At the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:13–15), believers’ works are tested by fire, not to determine salvation, but to reveal their quality and eternal value. Gold, silver, and precious stones represent works motivated by faith, love, and obedience. Wood, hay, and stubble

represent self-centered or worldly accomplishments. Even if a believer suffers loss in this testing, salvation remains secure.

Romans 8:1 reminds us: “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Justification by faith secures our eternal identity: our sins forgiven, Christ’s righteousness imputed, no condemnation remains, and our ultimate worth is already approved by God.

Paul’s secret of self-forgetfulness is revealed in 1 Corinthians 4:3–5: he neither seeks human approval nor relies on his own conscience for justification. Instead, he anchors himself in the eternal verdict of God, trusting that God’s judgment alone defines his true worth.

5. Freedom from the Approval Trap

When believers understand that their identity and reward are rooted in God’s verdict, the compulsion to “perform” or “show oneself” dissolves. Keller explains:

“The trial is over for him. He is out of the courtroom. It is gone. It is over. Because the ultimate verdict is in.”

This perspective liberates believers to live faithfully without anxiety:

Work diligently in the workplace, knowing Christ sees your labor (Colossians 3:23). Serve in the church or community, seeking God’s approval, not human applause. Invest in family and relationships, understanding that God values faithfulness and love. Engage in acts of generosity and kindness, knowing these lay treasures in heaven (Matthew 10:42). 6. Living in the Joy of Stewardship

1 Corinthians 4:2 exhorts: “It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” True self-esteem is realized not by comparison, accolades, or social success, but in the faithful stewardship of all that God entrusts to us.

Keller summarizes beautifully: *“Because He loves me and He accepts me, I do not have to do things just to build up my résumé. I can do things for the joy of doing them.”*

Whether through daily work, family life, or ministry, the believer’s life becomes a platform for eternal impact. Success is measured not by worldly standards, but by faithfulness and eternal reward.

7. Conclusion: Anchoring Identity in Christ

The Judgment Seat of Christ calls believers to a profound freedom: to rest in God’s verdict, to embrace gospel humility, and to serve faithfully without dependence on human validation. Self-esteem rooted in Christ is not fragile, empty, or competitive; it is secure, steady, and joy-filled.

As Keller notes, echoing Paul: “Like Paul, we can say, ‘I don’t care what you think. I don’t even care what I think. I only care about what the Lord thinks.’ And He has said, ‘You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.’”

C. S. Lewis - "If you read history you will find out that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next."

Worksheet on Self-Esteem In Light Of Christ

Breakout Session Worksheet (Based on Timothy Keller's The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness)

Opening Thought

"The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us." – Tim Keller

True self-esteem isn't about thinking too much or too little of yourself. It's about **thinking of yourself less** and being filled with Christ instead of being puffed up with self.

1. The Human Heart and the Search for Worth

Søren Kierkegaard: *"It is the normal state of the human heart to try to build its identity around something besides God."*

★ Reflection Question:

- What are the common things young people around you (or even you) use to measure self-worth? (e.g., looks, money, grades, social media, talent, influence)

✍ My Answer:

.....
.....
.....

2. The Courtroom of Daily Life

Keller says: *“Every single day, we are in the courtroom. Every single day, we are on trial... Some days we feel we are winning, other days we feel we are losing.”*

Read 1 Corinthians 4:3–4

Paul says he doesn’t live for human verdicts or even his own verdict. Only God’s verdict counts.

★ **Discussion Prompt:**

- How does social media or peer pressure make you feel “on trial” every day?
- How could Paul’s mindset free you from that?

✍ My Answer:

.....
.....

3. Gospel Humility and True Self-Esteem

C.S. Lewis: *“Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next person.”*

Keller: *“The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or less of myself—it is thinking of myself less.”*

★ **Reflection Question:**

- In your own words, what does “self-forgetfulness” mean?
- How might it change the way you interact with others?

✍ My Answer:

.....
.....

4. The Judgment Seat of Christ and Identity in God

Read 1 Corinthians 3:13–15 and Romans 8:1

- Our works are tested—not our salvation.
- Christ has already given us **no condemnation**.
- Our worth is secure, and our works are rewarded.

★ **Discussion Prompt:**

- How does knowing “*the trial is already over*” (Keller) change the way you live?
- Does it help with feelings of insecurity or comparison?

✍ My Answer:

.....
.....

5. Freedom from the Approval Trap

Keller: “*The trial is over for him. He is out of the courtroom. It is gone. It is over. Because the ultimate verdict is in.*”

★ **Reflection Question:**

- Whose approval do you most often find yourself craving?
- What would it look like to live free from that craving?

✍ My Answer:

.....
.....

6. Living in the Joy of Stewardship

Read 1 Corinthians 4:2

“It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

✓ Truth:

Success ≠ Fame, money, likes.

Success = Faithfulness to what Christ gave you.

★ **Group Activity:**

- In pairs, share one area of life (school, work, friendships, ministry) where you want to shift from seeking recognition to simply being faithful.

✍ My Commitment:

.....
.....

7. Conclusion: Anchoring Identity in Christ

Keller (echoing Paul): *“Like Paul, we can say, ‘I don’t care what you think. I don’t even care what I think. I only care about what the Lord thinks.’ And He has said, ‘You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.’”*

✦ **Final Reflection:**

- Write a prayer or declaration that re-centers your identity in Christ, not in performance or comparison.

✍ My Prayer/Declaration:

.....
.....

✓ **Takeaway:**

Your worth is not in what you achieve, how you compare, or who applauds you. Your worth is secure in Christ, and one day His “Well done” will be the crown of your life.

ABOUT THE YOUNG MINISTERS' FORUM

The Young Ministers' Forum (TYMF) is a parachurch movement committed to strengthening and equipping young ministers to fulfill God's purpose. Our goal is to inspire and train a new generation of Gospel-driven leaders who will actively advance the Great Commission in every sphere of influence. We provide mentorship, teaching, and fellowship to help young ministers navigate challenges such as distractions, ministry decadence, loneliness, and balancing life responsibilities.

Vision: "Strengthening and Equipping Young Ministers to Serve God's Purpose."

MISSION

Mentorship: We connect young ministers with experienced leaders who provide biblical teaching, practical ministry insights, and personal guidance to foster spiritual growth and effectiveness.

Training and Equipping: Through workshops, seminars, and structured training sessions, we enhance ministerial effectiveness, doctrinal understanding, and active ministerial engagement.

Fellowship and Camaraderie: TYMF provides a network for like-minded ministers to connect, share experiences, and strengthen one another in faith and ministry.

Resources and Support: We produce resources like tracts, booklets, ebooks, evangelistic and study materials for outreaches and strengthening local churches.

Personal and Spiritual Development: We emphasize character building, spiritual disciplines, and holistic growth, ensuring that ministers are well-grounded in faith and integrity.

Mission and World Evangelism: With a strong passion for evangelism and cross-cultural ministry, we encourage young ministers to embrace their calling to spread the Gospel globally.

TYMF invites young ministers seeking growth, mentorship, and alignment with God's purpose to join our community and benefit from its resources.