

I. The Building Blocks of Spiritual Maturity

Let us turn to Proverbs chapter 4. We have started, several months ago, a verse-by-verse study of the book of Proverbs, and we have learned many fundamental things. We are still in the introductory chapters; the book of Proverbs itself does not really start until chapter 8. However, we have been defining many things and getting much good, solid material for our personal lives.

We have been talking about, as the book of Proverbs has been focusing on, getting God's wisdom, getting understanding from God, and then learning how to hold on to it and keep it. That is what we have been focusing on. Last week, we saw the process to attain and get it, and I showed you the building blocks of spiritual maturity.

Everyone here should be in a building program. The first thing pastors do when they get a church is to get into some kind of building program to keep the church motivated. Often, the facility they have is just fine, but they are taught today that if you want to build a church, get the people committed and involved in a building program, and everyone will unify around that. They have all kinds of tricks to do that.

I was associated with a church one time where they wanted to build a new building. The pastor was asking every family to give \$2,000. If they got 100 families, that is a good chunk of money to put down on a building. He used every trick in the book. One Sunday, he had all the little kids come in with their pennies and put them in a jar in front of the whole church, as if to say, "If the kids are doing what they can do, what are you going to do?" It was a guilt trip. Then he used the tactic, which was all taught in Bible college, where he put up a big sign with all the families that had given \$2,000. Obviously, when you put up a sign that says all the families gave \$2,000, you draw attention to the families that did not give \$2,000, which puts a little general pressure on them.

I am into building programs. I really am. The moment we started our church, I started a building program. That building program is to build you to be spiritually mature. I am not worried about the building. I love this place. It has nice colored stained ceilings, and the carpet is great. I love it. I love this place; it is everything I could ever want. Worst case scenario, if a tornado ever comes through Independence, we do not have to move if we are in a church ceremony. We are good to go.

A real church should have a building program and should be constantly involved in one. It should be the building program of building people. That is the only building program that you need to be continuously in. I am not saying there is not a time that you have to build a building, but there is a thing where you have to build people first. That is the key.

I showed you the building blocks last week of spiritual maturity: building Bible principles on the foundation that you lay the day you got saved. I told you how that 1 Corinthians chapter 3 says that the foundation is Jesus Christ when you got saved. I showed you from Isaiah chapter 28,

verses 9 and 10, how you do that. He talks about line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. I showed you the analogy back there. The analogy back there is like laying bricks on a foundation.

Romans 1:19-20

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Everything in life is a picture of something if you just understand the Bible enough. When you build a wall, as I told you last week, you have to lay a foundation. When you lay a foundation, you then start building blocks on that wall. I showed you how that is a spiritual picture of your body being the temple of God. Each one of those building blocks represents a Bible doctrine. When you go through discipleship, or discipleship two, or like this coming Thursday night when we start to structure the Bible, you are going to get some major doctrine that you can put on your foundation. It is going to really help you understand the Scriptures and how it all comes together.

Then I told you how that when you lay those bricks on a wall, if you ever saw a brick wall, they are not lined up exactly on top of each other. They are set off in the middle so that it all ties them all together. After my sermon last week, several of the guys who are builders and know much more about it than I do came up and gave me a little more insight on it. Steve Bracken told me that when you build a wall, you put up seven courses of brick. In the building mindset, those seven courses of bricks are considered a freestanding wall; it is ready to go. Then, in their building mindset, the eighth level that you put on it is the new beginning of the next seven. That is a self-sustaining wall.

So, what he was saying is that every seven courses of bricks form a self-sustaining wall, and then the eighth course forms another self-sustaining wall of seven. By the time you are done, you may have eight or nine series of sevens that tie that wall all together. That is incredible because that is exactly what the Bible does. The Bible does the exact same thing. You have heard me talk about it many, many times in the Bible. You have the seven judgments. You have the seven mysteries. You have seven resurrections. You have a series of sevens throughout the Bible that when you build on that foundation, you build them as series of sevens. When you are done, they are independent of yourselves. Then you build the next course of sevens on top of them. Soon, they all interlock together, and your temple is strong. The line keeps you from getting off course with the thing.

When you lay down a line of bricks, they call it a course. That course of bricks is in our life. We talk about the course of life. We talk about that line that keeps everything straight. Yet, in our personal life, we talk about as Baptists, we have a heritage. Our line goes back through a biblical line to Antioch. It is what keeps us straight. All of those things together are a tremendous picture of how things work in the Bible. That is why in Isaiah 28, he used that analogy of laying blocks and keeping the wall straight.

II. Exalting Wisdom and Spiritual Promotion

Today, we are going to pick it up in verse 8. Again, we will see the benefits of getting God's wisdom and understanding, and along with that, the value of keeping it.

Proverbs 4:8-9

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.

She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

Father, help us today to learn from Your Word, to grow from Your Word, and take all of the things that You have for us. Lord, put them into our life today. We thank You for those that made it out today and pray Your blessings upon all that we try to learn for You. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name for His sake we ask it. Amen.

Look at verse 8. Verse 8 says, "Exalt her." That, of course, refers to wisdom and understanding. That means putting the Word of God number one in your life first. It means simply knowing the Bible, getting to the place in your life that you know the Bible better than anything else you do. It says, "Exalt her, and she will promote thee."

If you like to do word studies in the Bible, one of the great word studies to study is the word "promote" or "promotion." It is only found a few times in the Bible.

Psalms 75:6-7

For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.

But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

God gives you three directions, three points on a compass: east, west, and south. Then He puts Himself in the place of north. Of course, we know from the Bible that the Bible talks about heaven being north. It talks about the sides of the north. In Psalms chapter 48, it talks about Him stretching out the north over the empty place and hanging the earth upon nothing in Job chapter 26. So, we know what it represents. It represents the fact that there is a day coming that you and I are going to get the ultimate promotion.

I must say this, too: in Proverbs chapter 3, verse 35, the Bible says fools get a promotion. That is a great study in the Bible. The Bible says that they get promoted to shame. You may wonder how that would sound like a demotion, but it is not. In Bible doctrine, it is a promotion. It is a great study in the Bible; I do not have time to get into it today, but it is a great study.

I have always enjoyed the Salvation Army from one aspect: I used to get a chance to read their newspapers. When an old Salvation Army saint went home to be with the Lord, they always had a section, and that section was always called "Promoted to Glory." I always thought that was really neat that they did that. As you grow and become spiritually mature and you learn to exalt the wisdom of God and the understanding of God, you do that through His book. You do that instead of correcting and tearing the Word of God apart, as we talked about Thursday night. You make it the number one thing in your life, and you go through life in a series of basically spiritual promotions.

In the army, when you come out of basic, they do not make you a sergeant. You have to go through something in the military they call "time in grade." It simply means, in its simplest form, that you have to spend some time before you can make the grade, a rank being the grade. They know that the longer you spend in the military, the more you are going to understand how the military operates. The military is a very complicated thing. It seems like it is nothing just the army, but the internal structure of how it works is incredibly massive. When you get into small group operations, whether you have squads or companies, there is a very complicated format that it needs to follow. The Navy is even more exact than the army because they both have it, but they have a regulation handbook that you have to go by the regulations. You do not just get in the army or the Navy and do whatever you want to do. The term "by the book" started in the military in that sense because there are regulations that you have to follow. You just cannot look at a situation and say, "Well, this is what I am going to do because I am the sergeant." You have to understand the regulation behind it.

It is much like the Bible. The Bible is our handbook. It is our book of regulations. Just as a guy getting out of basic does not understand the regulations, he has to put in the time to get the grade. In that time, he learns the regulations so that he can make the decisions based on it. In the ministry, in the church, it is the same concept. Our book of regulations is the Word of God. When you spend the time here growing and learning those principles and the regulations in time, then you come up through the grade, and you get promotion spiritually, just like they get them in the military. You go from a private to a corporal to a sergeant to a staff sergeant and right up the line. Then, if you are really lucky and really good, you get a battlefield commission and you become an officer. It is the same way in the ministry, exactly the same way.

This is why when some of you come in, you just get saved in our church, and maybe you just come out of the world and you got saved, and you are a baby Christian. Some of you have been out in churches for a while, and you have been around, and you are a Christian, but you just never really had a chance to grow. When you come into a place like this, you have that opportunity. You actually watch the spiritual promotions. If you are looking at it, I see it all the time in your life. I see it to the place that the first thing you do, as we talked about last week, is you get disciplined. You get disciplined, and then you go through those 10 lessons, and you get a fundamental grasp on the principles, the regulations. Down the line shortly thereafter, we will allow you to disciple somebody yourself. That is a promotion.

Some of you get into prayer groups. When you get into prayer groups, you sit there and you watch the person who is running the prayer groups. Many of you, after two or three times in a prayer group, have come to me and said, "Bob, do you think I am ready to take a prayer group?" And I say, "Absolutely." That is a promotion. Some of you come in here, and you do things well, and you grow, and you get into the Bible, and you really buy into the ministry, and you prove yourself. So, down the line someplace, you become a deacon or you become an elder. You put in the time, but those are the concepts I am talking about of spiritual promotions.

The chance of going over here to this rest home and being able to put together a team for some of you young guys to go in. That is where I started preaching many, many years ago. You learn how to deal with all kinds of things. My wife was in a rest home place one time, and we were

preaching someplace, and it was a bunch of... She was with me. I was preaching there; she was not in it. You have to learn how to deal with it. Right in the front row, a woman had a sucker in her mouth. She was sucking on the sucker, and I was flying. It came off the stick and got stuck in her throat. So, she is in the front row. This is a true story. She is in the front row. She is gagging, turning blue. The nurses are working on her, and I just keep on preaching. That is what you have to do.

There are things like that that help you get your feet on the ground. It helps you learn in a very basic mode. It is the entry level. Yet, it is good for you older guys to bring some young guy along. It is good for the girls because there is no reason why you cannot hold Bible studies with some of those ladies over there once we get our feet on the ground. It is an open door. We go through. We see what the opportunities are, just like we did at a restart and turn around. Sometimes they work out for us like they do for us. Sometimes they do not, like the trailer park. They work out the way we want it. Bob is praying about going to be a missionary to trailer parks after that experience. It was an incredible situation.

That is what it says here. You exalt her. You put it number one in your life. You make the Bible, the ministry, our church, the things of God number one in your life, and it promotes you. It brings you up through the stages of spiritual maturity.

III. Embracing Wisdom and Receiving Honor

Look at the last part of that verse. It says, "she shall bring thee honor when thou dost embrace her."

2 Timothy 2:20-21

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

That verse clearly says that there are going to be people who, for God, become a vessel of honor. They grow. They get spiritually mature. God promotes them up through it. Where you walk in the door of a church or this church, one day, five years later, you are a leader in the church. You are actually doing things that you had no idea what was going on the day you walked in. Through the process of promotion, time and grade, spending the time, learning the regulations, learning the book, learning all it does, God brings you up through those things. You get promoted through them, and you become a vessel of honor.

When you embrace wisdom and understanding, it brings you honor in two aspects of your life. First of all, it is in the life now. People will see your life. This happens all the time in our church. People see your life, and they see the difference in your life. You may work with them. You may have a relationship with them, and they see your family. They see your life. They see that it is different, and it is what they want. They see the camaraderie that you have with other people, and you see God using you, and you talk about the things that you do for the Lord. They desperately

want that. They will see that they have some issues in their life, their marriage, or their family. They see your life and your marriage and your family doing very well, and they want that. So, they seek you out. They come to you. They see in your life and your relationship with the Lord what they really want. They see the difference that God has made in your life.

I do not know how many times that has happened over and over again with people in our church who have really committed themselves to the things of the Lord and have their families lined up and have their marriages where they need to be. This world is broken and busted. It is an insane asylum run by the inmates for all practical purposes. In spite of that, I am telling you, there are people out there who want the truth. There are people out there who want the real deal. When they see the real deal in your life, they know in an instant it is the real deal. God will use that honor in your life. They will seek you out. That is an honorable thing. I cannot think of any greater honor in this life for a Christian to have than to have a testimony where on one hand people hate you to pieces, and on the other hand, they want everything that you have got. That is the greatest balance that you can have in your life: people seeking you out because of what God has done in your life.

The second aspect will simply be this: the honor you receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ from serving God down here and giving Him the honor and glory down here so you get it up there too. You get the honor of being used of God down here, but you get the honor at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

This is what the Bible means in 1 Timothy 5, verse 17. Maybe you have always wondered about this verse where it says:

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

That is what that means. You get the honor down here of being used of God and people looking and seeing God in your life. Because you do what is right with it and you honestly take the honor that you have down here and turn it back to the Lord, you get honored down here. But then at the Judgment Seat of Christ, you get honored there. It is a double honor based on laboring in the Word of God. Notice it says, "especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine." There is the key. You get it down here; people see it in you, and then you get it again at the Judgment Seat of Christ for embracing wisdom and understanding and letting it use you as God sees fit to use you.

Simply embracing wisdom and understanding, in time, you are going to have the ability to answer two of life's biggest questions. For you today as a Christian, even for an unsaved person, but certainly for a Christian, life's two biggest questions are simply this: What is God really doing in your life? And the second question is, how am I a part of what God is doing? What is God doing, and how am I a part of it? Those are the two basic fundamental questions that every child of God has to figure out. When they figure it out, they only figure it out by embracing wisdom and understanding and letting God take them and grow them up, promote them. Just like I told you a little while ago, it probably takes five, six, seven years to understand the military,

how it works, how it operates. It probably takes you four, five, six years to understand how it all works with God. But you can get there. You can get there as fast as you want to get there.

IV. The Ornament of Grace and Crown of Glory

Look at verse 9.

Proverbs 4:9

She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

Again, I want you to note the reference to crowns and grace and glory that is connected to your head. That is because 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, tells us:

1 Corinthians 11:3

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

Christ needs to be the head of our lives. That means it is an easy statement to say. What it means is that you get God's mind. You get the mind of Christ. You have the patterns of thought that are conducive to the principles in the Word of God. You think with your head. In other words, as a military man growing up gets time and grade and he understands how he operates in the military by the military manual handbook, you and I as Christians grow up and get the time and grade, and we understand how we deal with each other in life through our manual, the Word of God.

When Christ is the head of every life, you get wisdom and understanding. That leads you to getting the understanding of God's grace in your life. That is why he says He gives your head an ornament of grace. The first thing that you have got to get as a Christian for this ornament of grace is you have got to understand God's grace to you. That is the first aspect. When you understand God's grace to you, and you really understand it, it will manifest itself in the second format that becomes an ornament of grace to your head, your thinking. That is the grace that you show others.

There are lots of Christians out there that have taken God's grace and would not give an ounce of it to somebody else. You will take it for you. You will allow that grace to cover your stupidity, but you will not allow it to somebody else's stupidity. That just comes back to show you that you do not understand the concept to begin with. You do not have that ornament of grace to your head. Your thinking patterns are not built on the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, you will take the grace that God covers your mistakes with, but you will not allow somebody else to make some mistakes and give them the grace that God gave us. That is the problem.

Look at the last part of verse 9. The last part of verse 9 says, "A crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." This opens up one of the greatest studies in all of the Bible on the crowns that are associated with the Judgment Seat of Christ. When we came through 1 and 2 Corinthians a while back, we laid out the Judgment Seat of Christ in every detail from 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and then again 2 Corinthians chapter 5. We saw that our eternal rewards basically come in two

aspects, and this is very important that you understand this. These are two important Bible doctrines.

We talk a lot about our inheritance, and you hear a lot about that today. Maybe not as much as you used to, but you hear it. Yet in 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 12, the Bible says that somebody at some point in time in the future can get denied the inheritance, their reign with Christ.

2 Timothy 2:12

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

When you find your millennial inheritance in the Bible, or you find a reference to you getting an inheritance or a reign with Christ, a reign as a king, that context is always going to be the millennial reign of Christ, always will be. The thousand-year reign that we talked about on our chart back there. We will lay it out when we come through the pillars, and you will completely understand these things when we are done on Thursday night. They will be clear as a bell to you. You will find it in Revelation chapter 20. You will find it in Ezekiel chapter 40 through 48, the great 8 chapters on the millennial reign of Christ when I preached that message back in chapter 47 a while back. In the book of Psalms, the book of Psalms really falls into three formats from a doctrinal standpoint. The book of Psalms will show you Israel in the tribulation. It will show you Israel at the second coming. A lot of the Psalms, like Psalms 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, 140, 147, 148, 149, 150, they are called the millennial Psalms. They all picture what takes place in the millennium. So, when we talk about an inheritance, when we talk about you getting an inheritance or losing your inheritance, we are talking about your millennial inheritance. That time for a thousand years, you are going to reign with Christ for what you did or what you did not do down here.

The second aspect to your rewards will be the crowns. The crowns will always be associated with the Judgment Seat of Christ. They are not really associated with the millennium. They are connected, but they are primarily dealing with the day that we stand before Christ and give an account for what we did, which takes place right after the rapture of the church. If you would come through the Bible, you would find that there are five crowns that are listed. As I said, they are not really associated with the millennium directly, but rather the day of Jesus Christ, which is the Judgment Seat. You are going to find, and we are going to cover this when we get into it, and you will completely understand this on Thursday night, there are two days in your Bible you need to fundamentally understand. One of them is going to be the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord, wherever you find that in the Bible, will always be a reference to the second coming of Christ. That is where your inheritance lies. The other day is the Day of Jesus Christ. That will always be the rapture of the church, and that will always connect with the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is where our crowns are associated. We will lay all this out in great, grand detail when we start coming through it. When we are done with this course, many of you young Christians are going to have a whole new appreciation and understanding of the Scriptures. It is going to move your time and grade up.

You have to go through time and grade, but you can go through basic training, and after just a short period of time, you can sign up to go to NCO school. NCO school is a quick take that takes

you from where you are at, and it is like a crash course of becoming an NCO. You can go through that and accelerate that process of time and grade. Just as you can do that in the military, you can do that with the Bible and things like we are going to do this Thursday night. It is your NCO school. It will accelerate many things in your life.

Understanding these two concepts and the ability to grasp them and their importance is something most Christians never get to. All you have to do if you have a Christian friend someplace is ask them, "What about the five crowns?" They will have no clue what you are talking about. Here we are. These five crowns are listed in your Bible, and they are based on what you are going to get them for and what they are going to represent at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The most important thing to me on these that I saw years ago is not just the importance of understanding the crowns, but understanding what those crowns represent in my relationship with Christ. That is what I want you to see today.

V. The Five Crowns of the Believer

I am going to walk you through these.

1. The Incorruptible Crown This one is found in 1 Corinthians 9, verses 25 through 27.
Corinthians 9:25-27

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. This crown, called an incorruptible crown, deals with separating ourselves from the world. We have talked a lot about the mixed multitude, the people that have one foot in Christianity and one foot in the world, and in the world itself. You get this crown from understanding the doctrine of separation, and you stay away from those things. Notice, in verse 25, he compares a Christian to the Roman Olympics. There are two things that Paul will always use as an analogy for what a Christian should be. It is somebody who is in the Olympics, and you have got to remember in his day, especially in Corinth, that was the seat of the Roman Olympics at that particular point in time. So, he uses that. The other thing that he uses is the military as a soldier, and that is based on the greatest military the world has ever seen, the Roman Empire, that Paul was seeing walking up and down where he lived all the time. He understood that if he could get Christians to be as militant as the Roman Empire soldiers for God, and if he could get God's people to be as self-disciplined in their structure as somebody training for the Olympics, you would have an incredible Christian, and that is exactly the analogy that he is making, and it is an incredible thing. To be an athlete, to be a good athlete, you have to have structure in your life. You have to have discipline in your life. You have to have self-discipline in your life. You have to be able to pass up on the Ho-Hos and the Twinkies when you know you are in training, and that can be tough sometimes. You have to pass up on the french fries or this or that, and you have got to know that there are things that you cannot eat, there are things that you cannot do. Verse 26 says, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so

fight I, not as one that beateth the air." That right there in verse 26 is probably the state of 99.999% of God's people. They run, and everything they do in their Christian life, with uncertainty. They do not know anything for sure. They do not know their Bible. They do not know anything about the Bible. Everything they do, they run and they live in uncertainty. They are full of everything. They do not stand up for anything. It is all because when it comes to the Bible and everything in the Bible, and every issue in life, they are just uncertain how to deal with it. That is what the ministry is. That is what building you is: just getting you to be certain about the things that you have in your life. He says, "I fight, he says, don't fight like somebody who beats the air." That is throwing a punch without hitting anything. That is a... we use it all the time in our world. We talk about somebody at basketball, and he is out there, and he shoots a shot up to the bucket, and it is 50 miles off. What does everybody yell? "Air ball!" When you hear somebody preach that he is not telling the truth or he is not very good, you just say he is full of hot air. That is the problem today in preaching. Guys are standing up in a pulpit today preaching, but they are not saying anything. When you get into a pulpit and preach, you better hit something. Your desire to get into a pulpit is to take a swing at some things, and you better hit it. The problem with Christianity today is too many preachers are in a pulpit, and they are saying stuff that does not hit anybody. That is what he is talking about. Then he says in verse 27, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." That is talking about keeping your body under the subjection of the Word of God, simply living the right life by the principles of God. Of course, we all know that the greatest damage to the cause of Christ is God's people who say they love God, say they serve God, but they live like the world. Whatever they say loses its punch. Basically, in the eyes of the people that they ought to be winning to Christ and ought to be having the honor like we talked about, they become a castaway. You see it all the time. If it does not work for you, that is what they think. They look at somebody else and say, "Well, if it does not work for them, why will it work for me?" It comes down to the consistency of a transformed life. People seeing that not only do you believe the Word of God, but you live what you believe.

2. The Crown of Righteousness The second crown is found in 2 Timothy 4, verse 8. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. This is called the crown of righteousness. This is the crown that we would get because we just in our hearts and our minds cannot wait for the Lord to come back. You would think that this would be the easiest one to get. You would think that everybody who is saved would automatically chalk this one up. But it does not work that way. In fact, I will tell you something. This is probably one of the hardest ones to get. Because there are too many other things out there that we love in this world that we do not want to give up. We do not want, because we do not want to give up, we do not want to leave this planet. You are going to see it when you start preaching on the second coming of Christ, and you start preaching on this, or start preaching on the Lord coming back, and you have got people out there that get that real sick, pale, green-looking face. They have got things they do not want to leave. I can

be honest with you in one thing. I may lie to you in lots of things in life, but I can tell you about one thing I will tell you the truth. I have got no plans today, no matter what it may be, that I would not chuck in ten seconds if the Lord wanted to come pull me out of this mess. I have got nothing here to hold me. Because I have learned that this life is nothing more than a veil of tears. This life is a source of my heartache. It is a source of my problems, a source of my struggles. The thing that I am going to love about heaven more than anything else in this whole wide world, is the only thing I am going to love about it more than anything, is I am finally going to be in a place that whatever I think, and whatever I say, and whatever I do, I know is going to please the Lord. To me, this is heaven. But it is tough getting there. Matthew 22:37

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Did you ever try to do that on a consistent basis? I tell you, it is a tough thing to do. But the true mark of a spirit-filled, mature, saved Christian, a child of God, is to come into the place in your life that you are saved, and the more you are saved, the more you love God, the more you get promoted in the things, the more you see the real truth in things, the more God reveals to you out of His Word, the more you see what the real values are in life, and you come to the place after 40 or 50 years that you cannot stand this world, and you see it is the source of all your problems, and you just cannot wait to get out of this place. I know some of you cannot get there yet. I am not expecting you to. But you go through NCO school and get a battlefield commission a couple of times, and you will get an understanding of it. When I first got saved, I heard a guy preach one time. He said that he was preaching to us young men, and I just got into the aspect that God was calling me to preach. He said, "Young men, if you ever get into ministry, the battle you are going to get into is going to make all the battles of this world like kids shooting marbles." He said, "If God ever calls you to preach and you ever get into the ministry, the battle you are going to get into is going to make the battle of Bull Run and Chancellorsville and Shiloh and World War I and Belleau Wood and Iwo Jima and Okinawa and the Normandy invasion look like just a bunch of old ladies playing knitting." I did not understand what he said back then. I was young, I was inexperienced, but about 45 years later, I got exactly what he was talking about. I understand. I get it. The most comfortable place right now in your life, the most comfortable place in your life right now, ought to be in the church God puts you in getting fed the Word of God. You ought to learn to be comfortable in it, even when the preacher preaches some things that make you uncomfortable. Because the source of your comfort is that book. You know as well as I do, if you have got everything you wanted in life right now and you got your notes better than the joint with God, you would be a mess. That is just the way it runs. But you have got to work to get there. You have got to work to get there. When you get it for a moment of time and you get close to God and you are in a place, you are protected and you are safe, and all you have is the Spirit of God and nobody trying to pull you off here. Your undivided attention as to what God wants you to have, what the man is saying to you from the Word of God. You know it is the truth, and you know it is powerful, and it is changing your life, and it has the ability to give you what you want. That is what I am talking about. That is just a little bit of heaven down here.

3. The Crown of Glory This will be found in 1 Peter, chapter 5, verses 2 through 4. 1 Peter 5:2-4
Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. This crown of life is the crown that we get for feeding the flock. Here is one you get for deciding to help me in the ministry and help to do what God wants you to do when you begin to take the oversight for the things in the church that He has given us here in our church. This one deals with you taking a responsibility of teaching the Bible. This is why I prod and push you guys to get to the point in your life where you disciple somebody. This is where I try to get you to step up to the next level in discipleship two. This is why I try to get you to preach down at the mission or I try to get you to do this. This is what you do when you take a volleyball team or a softball team and you do devotions; you are feeding the flock. This is what we are going to talk about, another opportunity, this little rest home down here for these elder folks, just going in and feeding the flock. God gives you a crown associated with that. It is about your labor in the Word of God and your investment and how it shows. When you get promoted to this level, this is where you become invaluable to me. Because one man can only do so much. A smart pastor, if he is smart, what he will do is he will reproduce himself in other people that not only will he keep doing what he is doing, but he will get another 100 people out there doing the same thing on the same platform by the same mindset, then you have the thing cooking. Most preachers never figure that out. They never get to that point. They never understand the value of replicating themselves. I will tell you this too. Everything rises and falls on leadership. You can check the spiritual maturity level of the guy in charge by the spiritual maturity level of his church. It is just that simple. I tell you all the time, you will never love the Word of God and get excited about it if I do not love it and get excited about it. You know what? I can tell in a heartbeat when you are not excited about it anymore. You do not love it anymore. But you know what else is true? You will be able to tell it in me in 10 seconds. The day I lose my zeal for God and I am just like everybody else and I just stand up here and say, "All right, come on, let us get this over with." The day I look out there and I watch the TV last night and all the closings down there and I said, "Wow, all the news channels said they are going to be 6 to 9 inches tomorrow. Let us call church off. I got some things I would rather do anyhow." I could tell it in you in 10 seconds. You could tell it in me in 5 seconds. You know why? Because you cannot hide things like that. That is why you get to that point in your life where you get excited about it. You get to the point in your life where it gets inside of you, it gets infectious. What you want to do is you want to let God use you, and you want to win somebody to Christ. You want to disciple them. You want to get every opportunity you can. There is a crown that you can have just by going out and teaching somebody the Bible. You have people when you have an opportunity that says, "Well, I do not think I want to do that." I got it. That is one crown you will not have. When you get to this level, as I said, this is where you become invaluable. This is where the ministry really starts hitting on all cylinders. This is where everything starts to move on this level right here. This is where when you get people that have a good ability, and I will tell you right now, I have some of the best preachers in this country in this church.

Some of them are women. I will tell you what, they know their Bible. They know how to lay the Bible out. They know what it is. They can defend it. They can preach it. They can teach it. They can do everything they need to do. That was the church in Antioch. It was filled with men and women who preached and taught the Word of God to work together in ministry of the Word of God. When you study that passage in Acts chapter 12 and 13, it was all the races. All the races were involved. All the nationalities. They were Jews. They were Gentiles. They were from all walks of life. There were no racial barriers. There was no spiritual hierarchy. It was just a bunch of people who loved the Bible and loved God and got called by God, put in the situation, and they all preached the Word of God. Just people who loved God together and ministered together in ministry to the lost.

4. The Crown of Life There are two places we want to look at this. The first one is James chapter 1, verse 12. James 1:12

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Then the other one is Revelation 2, verse 10. Revelation 2:10

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. There are two different places that talk about the same crown because there are two aspects to this, two different concepts. Revelation chapter 2, verse 10, deals with the people who have paid the ultimate price for the gospel, and that is them being murdered. They are giving their life for the gospel, and history is filled with those. I encourage every Christian to read Fox's Book of Martyrs. Get the one edited by Forbes; it is the purest form. But there are plenty of them that are around. Richard Wurmbrand spent years in a prison in Romania. He wrote a book, Tortured for my Faith, a tremendous price that he paid. He died in 2001. There is a contemporary for one. Watchman Nee put out some of the greatest spiritual material you ever found in your life. He spent 20 some years in a Chinese communist prison or war camp. He died in 1972. He wrote some of the greatest books on the Christian life and prayer that you ever find, and they are still printed today. Haralan Popoff, 15 years in a communist prison camp in Bulgaria because he wanted to preach the gospel. A tremendous price that was paid, and these people, many of them died. No one ever knows what ever happened to Watchman Nee. It is incredible stuff. So, you find that the first aspect of this crown is for people who paid the ultimate price. But then James chapter 1, verse 12, deals with the persecution you get for your stand on the Word of God and preaching the truth or standing for the truth. Somebody said one time, and I do not take away from anything from the martyrs, I certainly do not. But somebody said one time in truth, "Anybody can die for the Lord. Sometimes it is tougher to live for the Lord than it is to die for Him." That is a great truth because sometimes when you die, it is over. But going through that drudgery day after day with people who once were your friends who do not do what is right with the Word of God, and you have got to take a stand against them or put your tail between your legs and still be their friend. You have got to be able to take a stand for those things. Take the persecution that comes with taking a stand for the truth in the Word of God. Simply living it in this old world is sometimes much harder than paying the ultimate price. Preaching the gospel, doing the work of the ministry. You have heard me say it many, many

times. Salvation, we talk about God's free gift of salvation. It may be free to you, but it is only free to you because somebody else paid the price for it. The problem is today we take the salvation of God that He paid the price for, but we are not willing to pay the price to put it out to somebody else. There is a crown with that one.

5. The Crown of Rejoicing This is found in two places also: Philippians 4, verse 1, and 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 19 and 20. Philippians 4:1

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

For ye are our glory and joy. This has been called the soul winner's crown. The places that it just gave you, Paul is making reference to people that he won to Christ. He calls them his crown. This one deals with your investment in the life of people to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ. Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. You can get this crown a number of ways. Everybody thinks you have got to be out there knocking on doors and witnessing to everybody that you find out there. That is not necessarily true. Though I think you need to be a witness to everybody. That does not mean you always say something. But you can get this crown by praying for people that they might get saved. You can get this crown by witnessing to people. You can get this crown by passing out tracts like we do when the teams go out. My vision is many times I will be down there, and I will be driving around. I will see one of your tracts that somebody you gave to somebody, and somebody threw it away. I never stop and pick it up. I never do. My first tendency years ago would be to stop and not let it go to waste. But then I realized that God's Word never returns void. I realized that God may have had that old guy throw it down there because He knew that guy did not want it. He was going to come walking down there and see that thing and pick it up, and it may be what he needs. I do not get into those things. Once I pass it out, it is God's deal. If the guy wants to throw it in a gutter, let him throw it in a gutter. God will pay the price for it with God, but God will still use it someplace along the line. I knew one time a missionary, a guy showed up at his mission station, and he had one of the tracts that they had passed out. That tract told how to get saved and said, "If you get saved, come to our mission station, and we will give you a Bible." He got saved, and he knew where the mission station was. He walked 20 miles to that mission station and told that missionary, "Missionary man, I got this tract, and I got saved, and I would like to have a Bible." The missionary was astounded. He says, "Who gave you the tract?" And he says, "No one gave me the tract, missionary man. I was out watching my goats and out watching my flocks. I was standing there, and the wind was blowing, and about a ways away, I saw something blowing across the thing that caught my attention. It was colored, and I walked over to pick it up, and it was his tract." Somebody threw that tract away, and God took that tract and blew it right where that guy was. I do not mess with those kinds of things. Once you put it out, then you claim the principle. You may never see it on this side, but I guarantee you, when we get to heaven, there will be some old homeless guy down there underneath the thing, and he is proud. He does not want to get saved. He is reading that tract, and he takes that thing and sits

down there, and he gets cold, and he gets thinking. The Holy Spirit of God started working on him. About 4:30 in the morning, he says, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and he gets saved. You never know about it. You never hear about it. You never see it until you get home to the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is how you get those crowns. I told you before, there are three aspects to soul winning. There is sowing the Word of God. There is watering, that is praying, and then you get to reap sometimes. Somebody else sometimes gets to reap. But it is being aware of the circumstances and the opportunities that people of God put in our lives to give them the gospel, using all that we do in this church to get the message out. We do it in softball. We do it in volleyball. We do it in our social events. We do it in our special Bible series like coming up Thursday. There will be people that will show up that would not come to a normal Bible study that will get a chance to hear the truth. In volleyball, there are people that are looking for the truth. They are looking for a good church. They are looking for somebody teaching the Bible. They find it through volleyball. They come out to think. God is looking at them, and they are thinking they are going to play volleyball. God is saying, "Well, you are going to play some volleyball, but the reason I got you, I want to get you where you get the truth." That is how it works.

VI. The Purpose of Crowns at the Judgment Seat of Christ

You might be wondering to yourself why crowns? What is the point to it all? I have actually had people say to me over the years, "Well, I do not really want a crown. I do not really need any crowns. I am just glad I am going to be with the Lord." A couple of things on that you probably want to consider. First of all, no crown here means no inheritance over there. So, you want to make sure you understand that little concept. The second thing you want to realize is this: What do those crowns represent?

The Judgment Seat of Christ on many levels is many aspects and many things. But one of the things that it does, it truly reveals. I do not know if you ever thought about it this way. But these crowns at the Judgment Seat of Christ really reveal every aspect of our Christian life that needs to be surrendered to the Lord. I do not know if you saw that. It is real easy to mask it all down here and play the game and learn the right answers and hide behind the circumstances and play the victim and make all kinds of excuses.

Romans 2:16

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

1 Corinthians 3:13

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.

When this judgment, these five crowns, notice there are not seven, you would think there would be seven because seven is God's perfect number. Why did He only give us five? Because five in the Bible is the number of death. These crowns go to the fact that Christ died for you, that you might have the ability to do what God wants you to do to earn these crowns.

I do not know if you ever saw it or not, but these crowns, we are getting them, each one of them, as you stand there that day, will reveal a different aspect of your complete, of a complete child of God in our life given over to God for His service. The first crown is the incorruptible crown. That is going to prove, if you get that, that you actually did separate yourself from the world. You will not be able to hide and say one thing; the crown will prove whether you did or whether you did not.

The second crown that you will have an opportunity to get will be the one that, do you really love Him? The love of His appearing, the crown of righteousness. It will not be a thing then that you can say, "Oh, I cannot." Or when I say, "Well, would not it be great the Lord come back?" everybody goes, "Amen." But you really do not mean it. The crown in that day will be the proof that you did mean that.

The third one, about teaching the Word of God, feeding the flock. You get that one, handed out to you, and you do not have to pretend like you do, or say you do, or walk around and strut around like you do. That crown will prove whether you do or whether you do not.

The fourth one will be the crown of your suffering or your martyrdom. We all pretend we suffer for the Lord. We all pretend that we go through great things. Most of the things that we go through, we go through because of our own stupidity. Very few of us go through anything because, I know it is true in my life, very few things I have ever went through that I went through because I was a victim. I went through because I was a perpetrator. So, you cannot count that. But if you get that crown, or that crown gets handed to you, it will be known in that day that you stood for the truth and you paid the price. A lot of people like to pretend. They like to pretend. You always had soldiers that way in the military. When they got on leave, they always run to the Army surplus store. There was one or a couple around every camp. They would always buy all the medals and put them on their chest. They would walk downtown, but they think they have been somewhere and done something. Christians do the same thing.

The fifth one would be the soul winning crown. You get that one, it will prove the fact that you cared about people. The crowns are so important to the Judgment Seat of Christ because it is going to be the thing that each one of them represents a different part of your life that needs to be turned over to the Lord. When you look at all five of them, it is all because Christ died for you on the cross. You stand there and do not get any crowns at all. It is going to be a stark realism to everybody in the assembled universe that there was not one thing you cared about down here. This is what our life should be right now. The Judgment Seat of Christ is built on a concept of honoring God by giving back to Him based on what He has given to you. That is really our Christian life and what it should be.

VII. Casting Crowns and Final Promotion

Look at Revelation chapter 4, verses 9 through 11.

Revelation 4:9-11

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

You see that? The context of that, if you know the book of Revelation, that is after the rapture of the church in chapter 4, verse 1. That is up in heaven at the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is real simple. Verse 11 says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

God gives me the crown, five of them. I can get five of those crowns. God gives them to me. That represents my total consecration in this life to Him based on what He has done for me. God says, "This is your reward." But it is not my reward to keep. Because the only way I got those is because, ultimately, it all goes back to what He did for me. So, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, He gives me those five crowns that represent what I did for Him. But, ultimately, I have got to give the honor and glory to Him because He is worthy. So, I take what He has given me and recognize that the only reason I got them is because, ultimately, what He did for me, and we lay them back at His feet. He gives them to me. I give the honor and glory back to Him, to whom it deserves to go. So, one by one, before the assembled universe of Christianity and all the saved people, all through the Bible, we come up and cast those crowns at His feet and give back to Him who is worthy all the glory that He has given to us. Each crown you lay at His feet will represent the area of our lives that you and I separated ourselves from this whole world, consecrated ourselves, surrendered ourselves to Him.

What a thought. What if in that day when you and I have absolutely nothing to lay at His feet? Nothing. I mean nothing. We have thrown our Christian lives and the opportunities that God has given us away. We played the game. We never took it real serious. We just did the minimum that we had to do. Never one day in our lives have we ever given up anything for Him. It was all about us. Whatever we did give Him, it was only out of our convenience and never out of our suffering.

In your hymnal on page 418, there is a great hymn called, "Must I Go in Empty Handed?" It simply says:

Must I go in empty handed?

Thus my dear Redeemer meet.

Not one day of service give Him.

Lay no trophy at His feet.

Must I go in empty handed?

Must I meet my Savior so?

Not one soul with which to greet Him.

Must I empty handed go?

He is not going to care about how many baskets and points you made in a basketball game. He is not going to care how many soccer goals you made. He is not going to care if you hit the ball over the fence. He is not going to care about any of those things. All He is going to look at in that day and care about that day, those five crowns. We stand there, after all He did for us and what He gave to us, and now we have them. We do not get to keep those rewards. We have an inheritance coming, but we take the crowns that He gave us. We recognize that the only reason we got them is ultimately what He did for me, and then we lay them at His feet. What a day that is going to be.

The answer is yes, there will be many of God's people who will have nothing in their hand to bring. One of the attributes of getting God's wisdom and understanding and keeping it is the insight that you get about this coming day. You do not ever hear it preached anymore, but it is a coming day. One by one we will walk up to that throne with the crowns that God gave us, the abilities to live for Him, and one by one we will lay them at His feet. There will be no excuse to be able to be given because the crowns will say it all. For the faithful Christian, it will be your final promotion to glory, your coronation day. For the faithless Christian, it will be your promotion day too.

Proverbs 3:35

The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.

That is one of the greatest studies in the Bible why a fool is not demoted, he is still promoted. It is an incredible study in your Bible. It will be the little guys, not the big shots of Christianity. It will be the common ordinary guy and gal who just quietly does the work of God without any fanfare, without any limelight, without any glory down here. No applauding crowds, no spotlights, no TV cameras rolling. Just doing it because they love the Lord. They love the Lord.

One time there was a football player. He played on the offense. He was the guy who would block when they were going to run the ball. They were in a big game. They were down by three points or four points. A field goal would not do it. They had to get a touchdown. The ball was on the 30-yard line. They got out of the huddle, and the quarterback said, "We are going to run the ball. Everybody block for him. This is the last play. We have got to get it done. This is our last shot. If we do not do this, we are going to go home in defeat." So, they lined up on the line, and the quarterback snapped the ball. When he backed up, they faked the pass, and then he handed off to the tailback. The tailback went around to the left side. The blocking guy was out in front of him, and he knocked one guy out of the way. This is just before he got to the goal line at about the 10-yard line. Three big other guys were coming after him. That old blocker put himself out there and stretched himself out and took all three of those guys out from the knees and just took all three of them out. That guy went in the end zone, made the touchdown. The place went crazy. The running back spiked the ball, did his little dance. All the team players ran in there, picked him up,

and put him on their shoulders. Everybody was screaming and yelling. They had won the game, and the end zone was chaos where the big touchdown was made.

That old blocker was back there with three big old bodies on him, busted and bloodied up where he took all three of those guys out. He kind of pushes them off, and they get up, and he looks up at the end zone and sees all that is going on over there, and he gets on one knee, and he is hurt. He has been nailed good. He had about 1200 pounds just fall onto him when he blocked for that guy to get in the end zone. He kind of gets on one knee, and the air is knocked out of him, and he has got blood here, and he has got dirt everywhere. He got dirt in his mouth and clogged in his face mask. He goes on one knee and he looks over to the sidelines, and there is the coach. The coach is not looking at the end zone. He is not celebrating because of the great touchdown that was made. He is totally oblivious to what is going on in the end zone, though he knows he won the game. When that old boy gets up on one knee and looks over to the sideline, that coach is transfixed on that blocker. That old boy looks over, and that coach looks at him and smiles and gives him a wink and gives him a thumbs up. He knows who was responsible for the celebration in the end zone.

In the ministry, I do not want the glory and the limelight and the TV cameras. Nothing interests me a bit. When we get home to heaven and all the hoopla and all that is going around, that will be great, and it will be a fun time. But there is only one thing I want. I want the coach of my life when this game of life is over. I want Him to look me eyeball to eyeball, and all I want is a wink and a thumbs up and out of His mouth, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." You blocked the opposition. You did the job. You took them out. You took the stand. You never compromised, and we won the game. Glory to God, that is what it is about. It is not about the limelight and all the big stuff and all the big things. It is about staying in that line and blocking. It is about running that offense and defense where you take out the opposition so that the ball can get in the end zone. All you want to hear in that day.

When I was in the Army, I actually saw a guy get the Congressional Medal of Honor. He had won it in 1968 in Vietnam. He was a special forces sergeant attached to an A-team that was way out in an A-camp, and they got overrun. All of his team was wounded, and he was the only one that was not, and he got wounded two times in the process. What he did was he manned an M60 machine gun, and he called in artillery on his own, some things that were all over the place. He called in artillery on it, and for two and a half hours he held off a whole company of NVA while the choppers got in and got the crew out. Then the gunships finally showed up and gave him support, and then he got out. That day I will never forget it. It was at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and there might have been 16, maybe 2000 troops out there at attention. There were four generals and three colonels and two lieutenant colonels, and it was an incredible thing. A major read the citation order and told over that thing, and I thought to myself, when they stood there, and they called his name out, it was like, all you could see were ranks of soldiers all dressed the same way, all the same clothes on, you could not tell them apart. Down that line when they called his name, he came out and marched up there and came before that thing, and that general took that Congressional Medal of Honor, put it around his neck, and then the general stood back, and the general saluted him. Once you win the Congressional Medal of Honor, you

salute no officer ever again. Everybody from the president down now salutes you. That general stood back and took that thing and saluted him, and he saluted back, and I tell you, years later I thought about that when I got saved and got right with God, and I thought, "What a day that will be." What a day that will be, when the Lord calls your name out, and you walk down those ranks, and He takes that crown and puts it on your head, and He steps back and salutes you. Glory to God, I am about to have a Pentecostal fit. What a day that will be. That is what it is. You recognizing what He did for you, giving it all for Him now. He gives it to you, the Judgment Seat of Christ, and then you stand there and say, "Yes, sir. Give it back to You, Lord, because if it was not for You, I would not have been here, and I could not have done anything. Glory and honor is worthy to You."

Father, thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, for these good people today.