

## REWARDS

Mrs. Shroyer, my second grade teacher, certainly knew how to bring joy to my young heart. She had a marvelous supply of colorful stickers that she used to reward pupils who scored 100% on their weekly spelling and arithmetic tests. I can remember taking my papers up to her desk and waiting while she checked my work. Almost always, when I returned to my seat, my paper was graced by a shiny sticker about the size of a quarter, in a variety of shapes: fruit, flowers, animals, birds and, around the holidays, something appropriate for the season. The image in my mind as I write is that of a plump orange pumpkin! I couldn't bear to throw those papers away, and so I kept them until shortly before my marriage. At that time I parted with many childhood things, some of which are still filed in my memory. I'm sure I would have been a good student even if there had been no stickers, but Mrs. Shroyer's method of rewarding excellence really was effective in promoting the desire to do well, to keep on studying.

All through the years of our schooling various forms of reward await us, luring us onward to exert effort, to achieve, to finish well. Among them are praise and recognition, promotion, certificates, plaques, prizes, honors, school letters, and finally, graduation ceremonies, diplomas and scholarships. In the work force the practice continues. Both management and their employees feel the need to reward good work and to be rewarded. Perhaps this is the cultural climate of our time and will change, but for now various perks, bonuses and other forms of recognition are used the same way awards are used in school. It is not my purpose to comment on business practices, but rather to use them as a springboard to get to the focus of this essay: Rewards in the Kingdom of God. Already I know that my thoughts are going to take me to unexpected places. That's all right! I am eager to begin ...

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My dictionary defines "reward" as something given in return for good or evil done or received; especially, something given or offered for some service or attainment. Synonyms are: premium; prize; award.

In the Kingdom of God "reward" is often confused with "gift," a word my dictionary defines as 1. the act or power of giving. 2. something given; a present. 3. a special ability; a talent.

Both are received. The important distinction is that rewards are earned; they are deserved. A gift, on the other hand, is just given; merit does not enter into the formula at all. In God's Kingdom the words "grace" and "faith" are connected with "gift," as in Ephesians 2:8,9: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.* Grace is undeserved, unearned favor, and faith is believing God enough to take him at his word. God offers us a gift and we open our arms to receive it; no work is involved on our part. All glory goes to God, not to us.

Many people spend years trying to earn their soul's salvation, trying to earn something that is a gift. I know, because I was one of them. I must have been about ten years old when I began to wonder what would happen to me if I died. Going to Sunday School and church with Dad and Grandma was a regular habit of mine, one that I really enjoyed. It was to my church that I looked for advice about how to get to Heaven when I died. The leaders helped me the best they could, but they could give me no assurance about Heaven, for they themselves were only hoping that they would be considered worthy of spending eternity there.

My teenage years were spent trying to be good enough to get to Heaven, which I found to be a losing battle. The church had a long list of things considered "worldly," things to be avoided if you wanted to spend eternity with Jesus. Finding it impossible to keep the list, and finding my mind flooded with "what if" questions that nobody could answer, I lived in a high state of anxiety that could

only be calmed by little green nerve pills. I can understand the Bible verse that labels the fear of death as slavery, for it certainly applied to me. Looking back, I marvel at the way God directed me, knowing that I was sincerely seeking him.

A crucial turning point came in my freshman dormitory room at college, when my new friend Ginny told me one evening that she was going to Heaven when she died. I was shocked! "I thought you had to die first and then find out if you made it," I said. Ginny said no, and explained that Jesus was her Savior. He promised eternal life to all who believed in him, she believed; her confidence was in Jesus, not her good life. This was exactly what I had been looking for, yet nearly two years passed before the Lord deemed me ready to receive his gift. First I needed to realize without question that I was a guilty sinner; all self-righteousness had to be gone – and now it was. Perhaps as a defense, I began to wonder if maybe there were no God; maybe the whole story was fiction. What a low point that was for me!

Then came the most marvelous day of my life. It started out to be quite ordinary. I was walking home from the shoe factory for lunch that balmy June day in 1953. I was twenty years old and glad to have found a job for the summer. As I walked across the baseball field near my home, I looked up to admire the puffy white clouds floating along against the beautiful blue sky. What a day! Suddenly an original poem popped into my head:

Nature proves there is a God.  
Look at the sky and the trees;  
Feel the warm sun and the breeze –  
There is a God!

I was elated! Of course there is a God! No one else knew that I had been thinking otherwise! And in an instant other wonderful things happened: I knew that Ginny was right; I was the Lord's and his forever; I would be in Heaven when I died! I knew also that I belonged with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship students at college. I had visited the group a few times with Ginny, but felt uncomfortable there; they had a common bond that I lacked. Now I was one of them! Though outwardly nothing had changed, inwardly everything was new; I was totally transformed! And I had not done anything to earn or deserve the gift God gave me that day. All I did was eagerly embrace it.

I ran the rest of the way home, quickly wrote down the poem and a few more verses to complete it, ate my lunch and returned to the shoe factory. Nearly fifty-two years have passed since then, years that I have lived out of gratitude to my Lord. What a Savior!

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In the summer of 1980, when I was assembling materials for the Bible Basics classes that I would soon begin to teach, I looked for a way to clearly show that God's salvation is a gift. I ended up writing a simple skit for two people, a gift giver (GG) and an intended receiver (IR). The skit has two acts, each with six scenes. I am going to reproduce the skit here, hoping that it will continue to help people in the years to come as it has in the past. The GG announces the scenes.

In the first act, a person is offering a gift to another person. (Usually I wrap some jewelry.)

SCENE 1: IGNORING.

GG holds out gift and says to IR, "I have a gift for you."  
IR walks right by, paying no attention to GG.

SCENE 2: REFUSING.

GG: "I have a gift for you."

IR: "No, thanks. I don't want a gift from you."

SCENE 3: DOUBTING.

GG: "I have a gift for you."

IR: Looks around and says, "I wonder who he (she) is talking to."

GG: "This gift is for you!"

IR: Shakes head and walks away saying, "It can't be for me. I don't deserve a gift from him (her)."

SCENE 4: DELAYING.

GG: "I have a gift for you."

IR: "That's nice, but I can't take it now."

GG: "You may not get another chance to take it."

IR: "I can't stop now. I'm so busy, in such a hurry, etc...."

SCENE 5: BARGAINING.

GG: "I have a gift for you."

IR: "Oh, how nice! I'd love to have it, but not for free, of course. What can I do to earn it?"

GG: "Why, nothing at all. I want to give it to you. It's free! Just take it!"

IR: "Oh, I couldn't do that. Let me do some work for you (make some offers) and when I have done enough to earn it, then give me the gift."

GG: "This is a gift, not wages for your work. Please take it."

IR: "I'm sorry, but I can't take something for nothing. That goes against all my upbringing."

SCENE 6: RECEIVING.

GG: "I have a gift for you."

IR: (Says "Thank you," takes the gift, opens it, admires it, expresses appreciation.)

Act two goes through the same six scenes, except this time it is understood that the gift giver is God and the gift being offered is salvation. The IR is one of us. In scene 4, use a church-related excuse for the delay and in scene 5, make religious promises. I use a box wrapped in red paper for the gift. Inside the box, folded several times, is a poster size paper on which is written:

SALVATION:

The forgiveness of all my sins –  
past, present and future.

Eternal Life – the assurance of a  
place in Heaven. Security.

Peace with God.

Christ's righteousness given to me.

The Holy Spirit permanently living  
within to guide and teach me.

AND MUCH MORE!!

The IR unfolds the paper and excitedly reads the whole list, giving thanks to GG. The paper is meant to convey the truth that salvation is a complex subject, impossible to exhaust, far too full to explain in

an essay such as this or understand completely in a lifetime of experience. But it's true – the items on the list are all to be received as gifts that cannot be earned. We don't have to pay for them because our Lord Jesus already paid the price by shedding his blood. The red paper represents the high cost of the gifts. Isn't it heartbreaking to think of the many who, in one way or another, do not respond to God's amazing offer of salvation? While we still have breath it is not too late to accept God's gift. If you have never received the salvation God offers you, please do it now!

In the skit the Intended Receiver usually hugs the Gift Giver, while saying "Thank you." To me, that is the essence of worship: showing appreciation for God's gifts, first with gratitude and then with good deeds. This leads me to the point that will close this section and open the next:

**GIFTS – lead to – GOOD WORKS – which lead to – REWARDS.**

Good works play a large role in the life of God's children, both individually and corporately. The good deeds are meant to flow from the salvation that we received as a gift. I have already quoted Ephesians 2:8,9, but I am going to do it again, this time adding verse 10: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Yes, it is the will of God for his redeemed children to be full of good deeds. This is perfectly logical when you think about it. Consider Paul's charge to the Philippian believers: *Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:12,13).* One aspect of our salvation is the fact that God actually lives inside us. That is powerful! Can you picture God working in us, trying to show himself through us? It is up to us to let the God-who-is-inside show on the outside through our hands, feet, mouths and strength, all for his good purpose. By our good deeds we are working out the salvation that is within us. Partnership with God – what an awesome privilege! This is the way Paul carried on his ministry. In Colossians 1:28,29 he says: *We proclaim [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* No doubt that inner strength and drive was also what Paul was referring to when he said, *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).*

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, *"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).* Our good deeds are meant to bring glory to God, but some glory may also reflect back on us. It is God-honoring to be known as a person of good deeds! Dorcas (Tabitha) was such a person. Her story, told in Acts 9:36 and following, has been a favorite of mine since childhood, perhaps because both of us liked to sew. Dorcas was a disciple *"who was always doing good and helping the poor."* She became sick and died, and her body was placed in an upstairs room. Hearing that Peter was nearby, the disciples found him and urged him to come at once. Peter came and entered the upstairs room. *"All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them."* The story ends with life returning to Dorcas' body, with wonderful results: *"This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord."* My heart has always thrilled when I read this story. I, too, wanted to live so that even in my death God would be glorified and God's kingdom would advance.

In his epistle, James says, *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:14-17).* My response to this Scripture has been, "Who would want to have a faith that is dead? Not!! I want my faith to be vibrant, fully alive." Don't you? If so, doing good works will be our way of life.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 contains instruction that has greatly influenced my life. In it, Paul says: *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

One thing we learn here is that foundations matter! My father, William Ziegler, was a building contractor for the last twenty-five years of his working career. He built “Quality Homes,” mostly of brick. Dad wanted to have a good reputation in his business and he achieved his goal. You can be sure he had strong foundations constructed underneath his houses! Paul used the analogy of building houses to describe his work of spreading the good news of the gospel. His part in the spiritual construction business was to lay good foundations, to teach well the truth about Jesus Christ. Those who became believers – both then and now – received God into their lives: Jesus Christ, our Solid Rock Foundation. After that, it is up to us to decide what materials we will use to build the rest of the house.

Early in my life of faith I strongly desired to live so that the quality of my work would survive the fire of judgment on that Day. I wanted a reward so that I would have something to place at the feet of Jesus in appreciation for the many gifts he has given me. I cannot imagine the sorrow of leaving the judgment of fire empty handed, which apparently some will do. The apostle Paul knew while on earth that he had rewards awaiting him in Heaven. The same can be true of us. In fact, we can send on ahead gold, silver and costly stones by following the advice of Jesus, who said: *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).* All that we store up in Heaven will surely remain after the judgment.

Some common misconceptions are answered by the 1 Corinthians 3 passage. First of all, the sins of believers are not being judged. Our sins have been forgiven, paid for, forgotten by God. Never will we have to face our sins again, not even in eternity, thank God! No, it is our works, the house that we built on the good foundation, that are being reviewed here. Jesus said, *Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes someone known to be a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who welcomes someone known to be righteous will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is known to be my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly be rewarded (Matthew 10:40-42).* God is no one's debtor! The things we have done for his sake, God remembers and will reward.

Secondly, this judgment is not given to see whether or not the person gets to remain in Heaven. We would not be there if we were not believers. Take heart: no one will be ejected from Heaven. Jesus Christ, our Foundation, has already been through the fire of judgment and survived beautifully. He will not be damaged in that judgment Day. Just remember that Heaven itself is not a reward; it is part of the gift of salvation.

The first Bible verse God gave me in music was Galatians 5:1 – *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* I knew God was giving me a warning. It was 1977. Just a year earlier our family had left a church that severely restricted the ministry of women to attend a Bible church in our town. God had been enlarging my vision for several years and now, at our new church, the process accelerated. God was telling me, by way of music, to be sure I never went back into “slavery” again.

In 1980, with the pastor's approval, I was elected by the congregation to a three-year term as Sunday School superintendent. What a change! I thrived in that job, discovering abilities – gifts from God! – that I didn't know I had. Surely these gifts were meant to be used! Then in 1981 our pastor retired and was replaced by a young man who was shocked to find a woman in a position of leadership. He had no objection to the quality of work I was doing; he just thought I should not be leading or teaching men. Finally, in September, 1982, this pastor told me he was taking over my job. I could still pick the songs and play the piano, he said, but he would do the rest. I didn't know what to do! Above all, I wanted to know what God wanted me to do.

At that time I was reading consecutively through the Bible. My portion on September 12, 1982 included 2 John, where verse 8 really caught my attention: *Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.* I knew God had spoken, giving me another warning, reminding me of Galatians 5:1. If God did not want me to resign or give up portions of my position, then I wouldn't – and I didn't. Instead I wrote the date in my Bible and continued serving fully as superintendant, wanting a full reward.

**GIFTS – lead to – GOOD WORKS – which lead to – REWARDS.**

In 1989, a pastor friend asked me if I could set to music the words God spoke to King Asa through the prophet Azariah: *But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded (2 Chronicles 15:7).* I felt that this verse should be combined with 1 Corinthians 15:58. Here are the words of these two verses as they appear in the song:

But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.  
Sisters and brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you.  
But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.  
Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord,  
For you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.  
But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.  
But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.

To me these are powerfully inspiring words, certainly enough to keep me working for a lifetime. There is no retirement from this kind of work! But what are these rewards, spoken of throughout the Bible? Are they all for the future, or are some given here? Since I cannot possibly exhaust the subject, I'm going to write about three kinds of rewards: **Friendship with God, Commendation from God and Crowns.**

The thought of **friendship with God** as a reward comes from Genesis 15:1 where the Lord was speaking to Abraham (then called Abram): *Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.* Friendship with God is definitely earned, and is based on obedience. Jesus said, *You are my friends if you do what I command (John 15:14).* Abraham had embarked years earlier on a life of obedience and the Bible narrative lets us see the friendship developing. Psalm 25:14 says: *The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.* The Living Bible translates the same verse this way: *Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him. With them alone he shares the secrets of his promise.* When God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord said, *"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (Genesis 18:17).* As the story unfolds, we hear the Lord – in the form of a man – talking the situation over with his friend Abraham, who negotiated – so reverently! – with the Lord over the possibility of sparing the cities. And then, *When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home (Genesis 18:33).*

In Genesis 22 we find the heights to which the friendship between God and Abraham had climbed. The story is sublime! God had an amazing secret to tell the right person. Abraham's faithfulness was tried and true. He would obey, no matter what God asked of him. So when God said, *"Take your son,*

*your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about,” it is not surprising to read that “Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.”*

On top of the mountain, when Isaac was bound and lying on the altar, and Abraham’s knife was raised, God stopped the sacrifice and provided a ram to die in place of Isaac. And then God knew: he could tell his secret to Abraham. “Right here, my friend,” God said in effect, “right here (for Moriah was later called Calvary) I am going to sacrifice my own beloved Son some day. I will be holding the knife (you know how that feels), only there will be no substitute for my Son.” God had confided his new covenant to Abraham, and how did Abraham respond? About two thousand years later, Jesus said: *“Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56)*. Yes, he was glad! And how their friendship deepened that day! Can you picture God and Abraham hugging on Mt. Moriah? I can!

God was indeed a very great reward for Abraham and not only for him, but for all people whose faith leads them to obedience – for you; for me. This reward starts on earth and I’m sure it continues in Heaven.

As for **commendation from God**, my thought comes mainly from a parable Jesus told about a man who gave his three servants sums of money before leaving on a journey. When he got back, he called the three servants to settle accounts with them. The one who had received five talents of money and the one who had received two had both doubled their money. To both the master said, *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness” (Matthew 25:21,23)*. (The third servant had hidden the one talent given to him and received a strong scolding. I’ll not write about him except to say that it is frightening enough to make me want to live like the first two!)

For many years I have been thinking that a “Well done, good and faithful servant” would be a wonderful thing to receive on that Day. Who knows, perhaps a commendation such as that would be in a form that could be placed at the feet of Jesus (as Mrs. Shroyer’s commendations took the form of colorful stickers). Although I have desired a “well done,” I do not feel that I deserve one. That’s because something else is sticking in my mind: the conclusion to another story Jesus told. It says: *So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:10)*. I can certainly say that I have only done my duty in the kingdom of God. Perhaps we need both points of view – desiring rewards and feeling unworthy – to keep us balanced, like the two sides of a coin.

At the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, he received a tremendous commendation from God. It happened at his baptism. As he was going up out of the water, a voice came from heaven saying, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17)*. The one who was commended often spoke of rewards in his teaching, including this from the Sermon on the Mount: *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:11,12)*. If rewards in Heaven are so great that they can make us rejoice while being persecuted and defamed, then I don’t think we emphasize them nearly enough. If we did, we would be stronger in the face of trials and troubles, even welcoming them (see James 1:2,3).

When you read about the persecution that some of the prophets went through, does your heart rejoice for them, knowing they will be rewarded greatly? The end of Hebrews 11 has always sparked my imagination. It mentions some of the horrible treatment that some people of faith endured, adding: *“the world was not worthy of them.”* That says to me that Heaven is worthy of them; it is the

place where they feel at home. That makes me happy! The chapter ends this way: *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what was promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.* Apparently something still remains in store for people of faith from Bible times and afterwards, including today. What could this be but rewards? I think the reason the rewards have not yet been given is because the full extent of their accounts has not yet been completed. As long as people are being influenced for good by the stories of others who are gone, treasure is still being amassed for them in Heaven. I'm glad I will be there to see the rewards being given! There are many people I want to thank.

Commendations from God may come on earth, in Heaven or both. The people in Hebrews 11, either named or implied, were certainly being commended. That does not mean they have received the full extent of their reward. More words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount are applicable here: *Be careful not to do your "acts of righteousness" in front of others, to be seen by them. 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. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:1-4).* Sincere people have worried that if anyone finds out about a good deed, or if they themselves remember it, their reward is lost. Not so; clearly, motivation is in view here. If earthly recognition is what we crave, that's all we will get.

The writers of the epistles mentioned rewards to motivate us to serve God all our lives. Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Paul's comparison of living a life of faith to a race is compelling, both in its contrasts and in its similarities. Back in Paul's time, athletes ran races for the honor of winning a crown of leaves, temporary, at best, but appealing enough to keep the runner going. A life lived for the Lord can be grueling as well as exhilarating, and requires training, as do athletic events, but Paul says the possibility of winning an everlasting crown makes it all worth while. In the Kingdom of God the "runners" are not in competition with each other; there are as many crowns as there are finishers of the race.

Paul knew that in races there are rules to follow and that breaking the rules would lead to disqualification. Similarly, he knew there were standards that God expected of his servants and he tried hard to live by them. Paul was never worried that he wouldn't go to Heaven when he died; rather, he didn't want to be found unworthy to serve God, and so be disqualified for the prize, the crown. Perhaps this concern was the balancing point (the other side of the coin) for Paul as he lived and worked with rewards on his mind.

Having introduced the topic of **crowns** as rewards, a family story comes to mind. My mother, Florence Ziegler, would do quiet deeds of kindness for others from time to time, often involving gifts of food. When I would compliment her, even in her old age, she would often answer, "I could use another star in my crown." Where did that thought come from? Perhaps from her mother. I can well imagine my Grandma Hicks saying that, with a lovely smile on her face. While a crown with stars is mentioned in the book of Revelation, it is not in connection with rewards. My best guess is that the thought came from an old hymn that asks, "Will there be any stars in my crown?" Whatever the origin of the saying, it helped spur my mother on to good works.

Here, for your meditation, are some more of the references to crowns as rewards in the Bible:



*– For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20).*

*– I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7,8).*

*– Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).*

*– (To the elders): Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:3,4).*

*– Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you into prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown (Revelation 2:10).*

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In the final chapter of the Bible, Jesus says to John, *“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what they have done” (Revelation 22:12).* May we reply with John, *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”*

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Verna Kwiatkowski

[www.vernakwiatkowski.com](http://www.vernakwiatkowski.com)

## ADDITIONS TO THE ESSAY “REWARDS”:

### “The Maypole Dance” and “Do Not Give Up” – The Story and the Song

I mentioned in this essay my long time desire for a “well done” in Heaven. In February, 2000, shortly before I retired as pastor of the Community Church of Yorktown, I preached a sermon about the will of God. It was one of the few sermons I wrote out in full and then read on Sunday morning. I thought of an illustration to conclude the sermon, the same one that returned to my mind as I was writing “Rewards.” I’ll never forget writing this story. I was sitting at my computer, typing as usual when, toward the end, it no longer seemed like I was the one doing the writing. I was amazed at what was appearing on my screen! I had not known how the story would end, but this was better than I could have imagined. Here it is, all for the glory of God.

### THE MAYPOLE DANCE

When I was a child, our school had a May Day program every spring, the highlight of which was the Maypole dance. I thought the dance was so beautiful! I loved watching the girls in their pastel gowns and the boys in their suits as they wove around each other to the music of the high school band, streamers held high, dipping and swaying, up and down, around and around. How magical to me was the pattern that began to appear at the top of the pole! The streamers were intertwining, making a multi-colored covering that crept downward, downward, as the dance went on. The streamers got shorter and shorter, and the participants got closer and closer to each other until finally the music stopped and the dance was over. What an experience for me to treasure!

Let’s use the imagery of a Maypole dance as a parable. The pole itself will represent the will of God. It has many streamers attached to the top. Anyone who can truly say, “I desire to do your will, O my God,” is invited to take hold of a streamer. How beautiful are the men and women, the boys and girls who are taking part in the dance! They are all wearing garments of salvation; they are clothed with Christ. Some are going in one direction and some in another, but they are all in step, for they are following heavenly music that only they can hear.

Look at the pattern forming at the top! Who but God could make so beautiful something that looks so ordinary, that looks like people just walking around a pole. But they are not just walking; they are dancing! See how they smile at each other as they meet, dipping and swaying! They are aware that something special is going on, that they are following God’s music. Though they may not know how the pattern is working out, they know there is a pattern, and that all things are working out for good. How could it be otherwise for those who so dearly love the Lord and one another?

Oh, don’t you want to take part in that dance? Are you properly dressed? Are you robed in the righteousness of Christ? Have you allowed Jesus to cleanse those garments of any stains you may have put on them? Then let’s draw closer and ask if we may join in the fun. We may? Just take a streamer? Oh, yes! We will!! Thank you!

What heavenly music! Our feet cannot keep still! We must dip and sway, in and out, around and around. Look who we are meeting as we dance! How we love each other! We are drawing closer and closer as time goes on. Time? Who is aware of time? We could dance forever, right into eternity! I delight to do your will, O my God ... my God ... What is that you are saying? “Well done, good and faithful servant! Welcome home! For you, the dance is over. Now you can watch the pattern with me from the top, for others are still dancing on the earth below. Isn’t it beautiful?”

Oh, yes! It is!!

## “DO NOT GIVE UP”: THE STORY AND THE SONG

I am including the music for the song that I quoted within the text of this essay. This is also a chance for me to share an amazing story, typical of the way God has guided me throughout my life.

In 1986 my husband Leo and I decided to vacation by leisurely driving through parts of New England that were new to us. In Rhode Island we came upon a Salvation Army thrift store and decided to stop. Both of us headed for the book section, I to the shelves marked “Religion.” While I was browsing, Leo came to me with a paperback in his hand and said, “Look at this. I found it in a stack of books on a chair. It says it is about discipleship and so is your ministry.” I took the book, a very clean copy with a broken spine, and saw that it was a devotional called *Daily With the King*. I did not know the author, but decided to buy the book based on Leo’s recommendation, despite the broken spine. When we arrived home the book joined many others that I would read “when I had time.”

Shortly thereafter I broke my right arm and found myself with plenty of time! I picked up *Daily With the King* and, starting from January 1, began reading it as a book, page after page, month after month. What rich reading! In a couple days I was up to about May in the book, when I could stand it no longer. My spirit so resonated with that of the author, Glyn Evans, that I knew I had to contact him. The biographical blurb showed that he lived in Rhode Island near where we bought the book! I called Information, dialed the number and soon had the first of many wonderful contacts with Glyn and his wife, Henrietta. A couple times Leo and I were overnight guests in their home.

In that first phone call Glyn found out that I was setting Scriptures to music and asked me to send him copies. When we were together, the four of us would gather around a piano and sing the songs. How encouraging! More than once Glyn suggested verses for possible songs, including 2 Chronicles 15:7, which I combined with 1 Corinthians 15:58. I hope that in many places people will gather around THEIR pianos and sing this song, which conveys such an encouraging message.

Isn’t God awesome? I don’t think any step – from someone donating a book to the Salvation Army to my printing this song here – was accidental, not even my broken arm! That’s why I say, as usual, to God be the glory!

II Chronicles 15:7 (NIV) Do Not Give Up Verna Mae Kwiatkowski  
 I Corinthians 15:58

But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be re-ward-ed.

Sis-ters and bro-thers, stand firm. Let no-thing move you. But as for

you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be re-ward-ed.

Give your-selves ful-ly to the work of the Lord, for you know that your la-bor

2nd time: diminuendo.

in the Lord is not in vain. But as for you, be strong and do

not give up, for your work will be re-ward-ed, -ward-ed.