

Ready for a Reward

What the Bible Says about Getting Ready for Christ's Return

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Prologue

Make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:17)

How do we get ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ? Is it necessary for those who are already born again to prepare themselves? I've read books on end-times prophecies that admonished me to "get ready" but didn't tell me how to get ready for the most momentous event of all time. What do Christians do to get ready? If we aren't ready when Christ comes, what would we lose?

I am a Christian. I have assurance of salvation through the promise of God, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Christ has forgiven my sins. The Holy Spirit dwells within me. The Lord answers my prayers.

With so much in my favor, should I be thinking about how to be ready? If Jesus paid it all, is there anything left for me to do? Yes. For the Lord warned us, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him" (Matt. 24:44). Jesus did not speak these words to unbelievers, but to disciples. He expects us to know what it means to "be ready."

What's After the Rapture?

I was taught that God will supernaturally remove all Christians from the earth seven years before Christ comes. Some teach that believers will be removed around three and a half years before Christ comes. Others teach Christians will be removed at Christ's return. Whichever is the case, my concern is that many "foolish virgins" (Matt. 25:1-2) are anticipating the coming of the heavenly bridegroom unaware of the Scriptures exhorting them how to

prepare for that momentous occasion. They are not unintelligent. Many have ideas on how events will lead up to the antichrist, the coming temple, or the one-world religion. But if they are not ready when Jesus comes, all this end-times knowledge will not benefit them.

Many pastors exhort their congregations to repent and live a holy life. This brings up the question of urgency. Why live godly if we are all going to heaven anyway? Why can't we attend the worship meetings only on Christmas and Easter and "coast" the rest of the time? Because to be ready is to be prepared to face the judgment. To face the judgment with joy is to receive a reward. The reward will be ours forever. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Thankfully, the Bible instructs us how to receive great rewards come judgment day.

Introduction

How we live now will make a difference when Jesus comes. It will result in reward or loss of reward. At His coming, our lifestyle will result in joy or shame, praise or rebuke. Our life's choices will result in the Lord commending us publicly to the Father or denying us before all the holy angels. Our rewards and losses are forever.

This book analyzes the Scriptures that persuade us to embrace lasting values—those high marks on our report card that can grant us a reward. Getting ready is not to be a last-ditch effort, but a lifestyle of pleasing God, of waiting for Him.

Do Prophecy Books Change Lives?

In 1982 a coworker gave me a copy of Hal Lindsey's end-times book, *The Terminal Generation*. I had left church about two years earlier and was just getting comfortable with the idea that God was not going to strike me dead for it. But the book made me uncomfortable all over again when I read about the doctrine of the Second Coming. I was profoundly moved but did not know what to do next.

Later I discovered a TV listing for a Billy Graham crusade in which he was to preach on the end of the world. My interest piqued, I watched the show, then prayed with Billy at the end.

During the next two years I was consumed by my new faith. I read the Bible all the way through in the first nine months. I read several books on prophecy, watched prophecy shows on TBN, and listened to several speakers expound on the book of Revelation. The authors and speakers claimed that the Rapture will inspire us to live more zealously for the Lord. But none of the prophetic views

changed my life. They did not cause me to aspire to greater zeal in service or to witness more to others.

My life changed radically after I joined a small church that emphasized commitment, accountability, faithfulness, and service. It believed in the inerrancy of the Word of God, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, Christ's atoning and substitutionary death for our sins, His bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven, the Second Coming in judgment, salvation by faith in Christ alone, and other major fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. We practiced accountability, active participation in the work of the church, taking the initiative to serve the Lord, and maturity through responsibility.

In this environment I learned a higher view of holiness, faithfulness, righteousness apart from law, empowerment by God's grace, stepping out in faith, and other Christlike standards. Prophecy did not change my life; living for Jesus did.

Why haven't prophecy books inspired a more holy devotion? The church is actually prophesied to fall away despite all our knowledge of the end times (see, for instance, 1 Tim. 4:1-3 and 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Most authors put a great emphasis on the interpretation and chronology of the Rapture of the church. The reader comes away with a jumble of fascinating facts rather than a life-changing confrontation with the Lord who loved her and gave Himself for her.

Putting the Word into Practice

I began to get ready for His coming when I learned that my choices will result in consequences commensurate with my decisions—as I sow, so shall I reap. If I sow to the flesh, I will reap corruption. If I sow to the spirit, I'll reap eternal life.

The Lord taught me early in my Christian life the importance of saying no to the flesh. I learned the purpose of self-denial, which is to strengthen my will for Him, making me more useful as a witness of resurrection life. Through the cross I also found the pathway to be conformed to His image.

Christ laid down His life for me; shall I not lay down my life for Him? Christ is holy; shall I not keep myself unspotted from this world? Christ prayed from the cross for others; shall I not pray even

when situations overwhelm me? Christ was peaceful in tribulation; shall I not anchor my ship to Him in roiling waters? Christ went the way of the cross for my sins; is it wise to love my sins when He has set me free from them?

Many people who are attending present-day fellowships do not know a life-changing God. They settle for the comforts of this life. For those who do not walk with God, doctrines about the Rapture may only make them more complacent, since they'll view it merely as an escape hatch from unwelcome discomforts. ("Beam me up, Lord!") They will feel as though they enjoy the best of two worlds—blessed by God in materialistic wealth, then spirited away by God for eternal riches.

In contrast the Bible says, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). Hebrews 11:5 clarifies Enoch's motivation: "he pleased God." Pleasing God in a walk of faith and obedience to Him is the surest way to prepare for the Second Coming. Do you please Him? Is your life a walk with God or against Him? We must learn to walk with God with the end in view, make choices that please the heart of our heavenly Father, and stand before Him in love.

A Right Relationship

The Rapture usually doesn't inspire anyone to a greater zeal apart from a sure foundation of a right relationship with Christ. Teaching the Rapture to people whose hearts are far from the Lord is like building a house on sand. A sound foundation must be laid first. That foundation is obedience to the Word of God. Obedience to the Word springs from a heart that is responsive to Christ, the Living Word. This heart will rejoice in the presence of Christ at the Rapture. A saved rebel will not.

Accepting Christ as Savior is not enough for readiness if a Christian does not or will not develop a relationship with the Lord. Most books on the end times do not indicate that much more is needed for readiness than simple salvation. In all fairness, "getting ready" simply has not been their thesis. Their focus is on a straight

presentation of their end-times view, or a vigorous defense of their Rapture position.

The Lord offers us full salvation. The Word's many promises function as the carrot on a stick to coax us into the fullness of salvation that His death, burial, and resurrection has won for us. Our salvation is great. Sins forgiven. Hell shut behind us. Heaven opened before us. An inheritance reserved above. Reigning with Christ. Knowing the truth. Answers to prayer. Hearing His voice. Being led by the Spirit. Freedom from the law. Love and fellowship. Turning from idols. Walking in faith. Righteous before God. The indwelling Father and Son.

All these aspects of salvation were just a jumble of impressions in my early Christian studies. Later I learned that different scriptural keys unlocked ever-greater doors opening into a fuller salvation experience and maturity of faith. Not every aspect of salvation is given immediately. If we want the promise to be led by the Spirit, we must crucify the flesh (Rom. 8:13–14). Do we covet the Father and Son's indwelling? They will abide with us if we show our love by obedience (John 14:21–23). Do we want to know the Lord's will for our life? Then we will surrender ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2). If I want the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, and peace, I must crucify my flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:22–24). The right keys in the locks open greater possibilities with God.

How This Book Teaches Readiness

A few years ago, I was looking for a used car. Wherever I drove, I saw For Sale signs on cars. Similarly, as I looked in the Word for instruction on getting ready for the Lord's coming, pertinent passages, like those For Sale signs, popped up everywhere. If we want to know how to be ready when Christ comes, the Lord will show us.

The verses that popped up contained two key aspects:

- A time frame of just before, during, or after the Lord's return.
- A value that pleases the Lord.

For example, in Matthew 25:21 we read, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you

ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” Both key aspects are in this verse. These words will be spoken after the Lord returns, when He rewards His servants. This verse emphasizes the Lord’s values of faithfulness and a job well done. I can be confident of a joyful meeting when I follow through to the end on the task the Lord has given me, and do it well. This is ready for a reward!

The following chapters are based on such verses, one value per chapter. Through such passages we will learn what the Bible says about making ready a people for the Lord. We will understand what the Lord is looking in His church when He comes again, see the value He places on how we live now, and take the practical steps we need to be ready. At the end of each chapter I summarize points I made about the value, suggest several applications to get the value in your life, and offer verses for further study and meditation.

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2:19–20).

Enduring

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. (2 Tim. 2:12)

I work for a factory that designs and manufactures radio-controlled hobby racing cars. These sixteen-inch cars can attain speeds of thirty miles per hour or more. They feature tunability to the track conditions, adaptability to various racing rules, are reasonably crash resistant, and maneuverable. Before the kit is presented to the public, the research and development team tests its cars for flaws and rectifies them to satisfy the demanding racer.

The Lord tests us to prepare us for a grand presentation in the kingdom. He tests us through suffering. Christians suffer that we may reign with Christ. We will suffer in the tests, just like the radio-control kits are crash tested. Very often the “good life” masks the problems within that suffering can uncover.

We may have been tossed by stormy winds of financial instability, an irksome neighbor, or a shaky marriage. But children of God understand what’s behind the events that are beyond our control. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). When our best-laid plans go awry, can we praise God for having put into effect a higher plan for our lives? When our ideas don’t work out, it’s only because God’s plan prevailed. When the washing machine breaks down and we don’t, it is because we believe that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

Suffering entered when the door of sin was opened. When God created Adam and Eve, He commanded them to subdue the world and have

dominion over it (Gen. 1:28). When Adam disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, he turned the whole creation over to Satan's dominion (Luke 4:6). Christ came to retrieve the dominion that was lost, one person at a time. The Lord labors in our lives to bring everything under His lordship. Sin is to be systematically dethroned. If we overcome sin, we will sit on thrones with Christ in His glorious kingdom. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

This process of suffering, this preparation needed to reign with Christ, has been misunderstood. Remember the story of the mother of two disciples who asked a favor of Jesus? "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom" (Matt. 20:21). This mother wanted the best for her children. But she misunderstood the nature of that reign, supposing that she could prevail for her sons by lobbying a political favor. The Master responded, "Are you ready to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22). Reigning with Him is attained by character growth, which is earned through adversity. This is the baptism of suffering.

Testing checks to see if the part added to the radio-control car will remain true to its task or reveal failures. I may pick up a teaching in the Word of God to be kinder and gentler. I resolve to make it part of my life. Then tensions at work test my resolve. When my co-worker fails to follow through as I expected and I react with dark thoughts and anger, the test reveals what areas I need to work on. Were my actions guided by the Lord's command or by my anger? Was I dependent on my co-worker for my peace and joy, or on the Lord and His love?

When I stand before God on that day of presentation, I want my feelings and thoughts to be solidly under His supervision. Suffering by itself is not an indication that we are bound for a throne, because everyone suffers. Suffering itself does not indicate whether the Lord is pleased or displeased with us.

We should expect to suffer when we make choices for the Lord. It may be more satisfying to get revenge, but when we choose to pray until we have the mind of God, we suffer according to the will of God. We may be tempted to cut corners, thinking that no one will notice. Suffering comes as we subject ourselves to doing the job carefully before the Lord.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:15-19)

Suffering for the Future

My employer's company designs its cars with the future in mind. Our radio-control kits must be able to stand the test of time while we upgrade other cars. Stress-testing new plastics, suspension arm mounting positions, and other designs in one car may help improve our other cars. Similarly, our suffering in trials can help other brethren endure. "If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer" (2 Cor. 1:6, NIV). The apostle Paul found the help of God and was able to pass on that encouragement.

At work I receive the customers' e-mails with questions. Some I answer with information from the instruction manual. Others I pass on to different departments because of my lack of experience with the issue. The answers shared from those departments are not found in any manual, but only in those who have solved the difficulty first-hand. Our Bible knowledge can only take us so far. But he who acts upon the Lord's command to endure will have a mature depth of faith to share with saving conviction.

In the end times, such men and women will be in short supply and sorely needed, for suffering will increase among God's people and the world at large. "The love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). Leaders need to be raised up, not through more Bible instruction, but through suffering. "I know what you're going through. I had the same problem and here's how the Lord helped me."

If we want our service to be enlarged, we must expect suffering. If I want to exercise my physical heart, I need to do more than simply ride my exercise bike for a comfortable twenty minutes. I must push my heart beyond what it

normally endures. If I wish to grow in physical strength, I cannot be satisfied with the same weight routine every day. I must push my muscles past their comfort zone with extra weight, or increase the number of repetitions. If men are to be raised up in these last days to encourage the flock, they must suffer.

Opportunities exist for suffering and growth even when the most exciting thing to happen in the month is a potluck. If I underestimate the importance of suffering, I will miss opportunities. When I don't feel like getting out of bed early for prayer, I miss the opportunity to become a prayer warrior who holds back the evil tide for my church and community. When I often decide to skip my evening Bible study for a more frivolous pursuit, I forgo the needed training to develop a spiritual backbone. When I show up at an outreach distracted and without a burden for souls, I blow that opportunity to be a powerful vehicle for God.

We are called to be Christians in the midst of the ordinary. Pray for enlargement and expect suffering to come. It may be that your present sufferings are the result of the Lord answering your pleas for growth!

Testing the Fit

Testing is a purifying work. Christians may go through more suffering after being saved because God is testing them. "The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). When gold is heated beyond normal temperature, impurities rise to the surface and are skimmed off by the refiner. If we have a "noble and good heart" (Luke 8:15), issues can be skimmed off the surface and disposed of by confession and repentance. The Lord allows suffering in our lives so we can be spared loss in the future. In that day fire will test our labors. "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

If a radio-controlled car hits a curb at a reasonable speed and breaks, it cannot be expected to withstand the rigors of high-speed competition. If we do not rule our own tempers during suffering, and our behavior damages our Christian testimony, can we be trusted to maintain Christ's standards as we rule on a throne in His kingdom? "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule

them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces'—as I have received from My Father” (Rev. 2:26–27). These future rulers will be uncompromising in their stand for the Lord's values. They will not waver in their commitment to the Lord when the heat was turned up.

In verses like these, the Lord reveals to us the character of the overcomers so that we may take courage from their example and persevere. Testing will reveal if we have built on the foundation of Christ and His commands or on self and its sinful, pathetic ways.

Whoever comes to Me and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. (Luke 6:48)

If a radio-control kit is not responsive to the driver's commands during testing due to poorly designed components, it cannot be depended on in racing conditions. If a private resists authority in combat practice, he is not ready to be deployed for the battle stations. If we do not fail the test to obey what the Lord says in His Word, He can trust us with a reward in His righteous kingdom.

When a politician is installed in his new administration, he appoints to high positions of authority those who labored hard with him. They earned that right. In *Firstborn Sons*¹, author G. H. Lang stated that before David became king, he and his men suffered much deprivation and hardship. It was only proper that he appoint in his kingdom those who had stood with him through thick and thin. He surrounded himself with those who were trustworthy. Should the Lord not do the same for His kingdom?

Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, . . . when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt. 19:28)

A Sound Foundation

The radio-control car design may be sound, having proven itself in past competition. In such cases, only small improvements are made in its next incarnation. But in a brand new vehicle, track testing may reveal flaws in the underlying chassis design. Entire sections of the car are replaced with new parts.

We may enter the Christian life convinced that we need only a few changes to our temperaments or habits. Our survival skills and defensive mechanisms have worked well so they were generally left alone. In reality, what we learned in our life without God cannot prepare us for the kingdom to come. Our worldly approach to life was founded on a corrupt chassis called the flesh, or sin nature.

The suffering that prepares us to reign with Christ convinces us of the sinfulness of the flesh nature and encourages us to scrap it by faith, then surrender to a new life of obedience. This is the personal suffering of the one committed to being Christ's disciple, the agony of saying No to oneself and Yes to Christ. If you love sleeping in, you'll know this agony as Christ calls you to a deeper commitment to His Word in the morning. Leaving your warm blankets early may be one of the hardest battles you'll ever undergo, but it will result in knowing His presence as you deny yourself to put His Word first. Not all self-denial is meant to turn us from sin, but certainly from that which hinders obedience.

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). When I think of a sound foundation, I think of a structure designed to support the building that will rest on it. Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18a). The object of our suffering and testing is to expose the foundation we are building on, whether it be the work of Christ or something else. Gold, silver, and precious stones maintain their character and purity when they undergo the fire because of their internal structure. Our love, faithfulness, and humility will withstand the rigors of the Judge's scrutiny because they were formed by Christ and maintained by Him. We build upon Him by meditation on His Word, putting it into practice, and trusting the Lord for the results. Wood, hay, and stubble do not maintain their structure during fire. If your love, joy, and peace quickly vanish in your service for the Master—if trial by fire reveals an underlying structure of bitterness, pride, envy, doubts, fears, inability, fearfulness, or inferiority—the foundation has been exposed as your own efforts.

“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12). Not every Christian will reign with Christ. The Lord will not force us to reign. If we desire to rule in His kingdom, we must accept His patient testing so that we may come forth as gold tried in the fire, purified seven times.

Our desire to be enthroned with Him will be tested by how much we want Him enthroned in our hearts. The world prepared us to live for this life according to our wits, our passions, our likes and dislikes. The world fed our flesh to live for sensual pleasure and covet the things of this life. That preparation, a corrupt foundation, will get us rejected from the kingdom. “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 5:5–6). The result of testing is to train up an obedient child of God, fit to rule with Christ.

Many car enthusiasts choose tires that served a Winston Cup champion or the oil that lubricated a winning Indianapolis 500 car. If we want to win in our spiritual race, let us choose that which worked for Christ. Let us follow His example of faith and courage. “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Knowing that our works will be tested before the judgment, let us be thankful and humble ourselves before the Lord and His purpose. Do not avoid suffering, but grasp the possibilities of being trained by it. The best way out of suffering is through it. “We must, through many tribulations, enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

* * *

Summary

What does the Bible say about getting ready for Christ’s return?

- “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12). A throne is not inevitable. It is attained through submission to the Lord’s instruction and training until “graduation day.” We have two prospects before us: enthronement or denial.

- “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter” (1 Peter 4:15–19). Suffering is an opportunity to glorify God as we praise Him before men rather than complain.
- “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17–18). Suffering is neither good nor bad—it’s our attitude that matters. Do we look at the things that are seen or unseen? Do we have the perspective of time or eternity?
- “That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:7–8). When we endure suffering, our continuing love for the Lord proves that we are more than fair-weather friends.
- The God of all comfort “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:4–5). In these last days, we need men who are willing to be trained in the way of suffering, that they may help others who suffer. Their encouragement will be more convincing when they have a testimony of endurance, of loyalty under fire.
- “To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Following in His steps leads us to a throne. Christ Jesus endured all, even though it was not “fair.” Christ endured suffering and gained the throne, thereby sanctifying suffering as a legitimate tool of God. We must not shirk the narrow way to attain the Lord’s highest calling. To be ready for Christ’s return is to be ready for a throne.

Application

How can we be ready in endurance?

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation. But let each one take heed how he builds on it” (1 Cor. 3:10). Here are several construction tips that have helped me to endure testing with Christ as the foundation.

- *Know what you are living for.* Prisoners are sometimes released early for good behavior. They keep out of trouble, obey commands, and volunteer for hard work. The possibility of an early release helps them endure the brutal prison conditions with self-control. I was taught, “Future expectation determines present behavior.” The trial is more bearable when we know that at the end it will be worth it all. The world’s message is “Live for now,” but Hebrews 11:13 teaches us that we are only “strangers and pilgrims” passing through. We bear up under the load knowing that we will receive a commendation from the Lord. “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). Job suffered much, but he maintained his integrity. Although he lost much, God blessed him more at the end than at the beginning.

- *Know what terrible fate you are avoiding.* How will they feel who did not make it to the end? “And I say to you, that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11–12). Weeping and gnashing of teeth is pretty foreign to our lifestyles. But that’s exactly what we’ll be doing when we see the reward we’ve forfeited through rejecting God’s training.

- *Know who is working in your life.* “If He loves me, why must He test me?” Our love must be tested to make sure it is genuine. The Lord knows us better than we do, so He puts us through the grinder so we can see where our love has failed, and where it needs to be brought to the Cross in faith and repentance. This life is a test track full of obstacles to our love. He Himself is faithful; He will never leave us nor forsake us. He has already proven His steadfast love for us by enduring much suffering at the hands of sinners, then dying for our sins on the cross. He shows us His love to encourage and strengthen us in rough times. Do we turn to the world for comfort or to Him?

The standards for our radio-control race cars are higher than the department-store variety because they are used in high speed, grueling competition all over the world. The Lord's standards are also high. He is seeking a spotless bride with a character like Himself. Those who desire to bear His image will be trained more rigorously than those who have chosen the world. Jesus revealed His standard when He said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24–25).

- *See how others have endured.* Are you tempted to say, "I can't take it anymore; human beings weren't made to undergo the trials I have to face"? Read biographies of those who have stood firm when their courage came under fire. For starters, I suggest reading *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Even in secular biographies you'll find ordinary men and women thrust into the heroic mold as they endure trials for sticking to their principles.

There is no greater example of endurance than our Lord Jesus Christ. Meditate on His patience shown to His disciples with their squabbles over who would be first in the kingdom. Examine His courage as He was questioned by the court authorities when they condemned Him to death and beat Him. Wonder at His selflessness on the cross as He prayed for those who abused Him. He could have called angels to deliver Him but chose to endure to the end. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

The Lord established the pattern to follow to gain a throne. If He suffered on the way to the cross, can we avoid it? If He went the way of humility, should we expect pride to get us a throne? If He depended on the Father for all His needs, should we assert independence? If Jesus came to serve, should we demand that others treat us like nobility? If we endure, we shall also reign with Him, but let us endure patiently as He did.

- *Pray over your troubles.* We were not meant to manage life on our own. Rebekah, Isaac's wife, prayed to understand her problem. "But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If all is well, then why am I this way?' So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her: 'Two nations are in your womb' " (Gen. 25:22–23a). When she prayed about the churning in her womb, she received wisdom impossible to obtain using only

natural reasoning. We are a privileged people in that we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, who will teach us the mind of the Lord regarding life's difficulties.

To contact the author or sign up for his weekly devotional that encourages believers to live with the end in view, please visit his Web site.

Web Site

<http://www.stevehusting.com/>

YahooGroup (weekly devotional)

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