

Welcome to our series that utilizes a phrase from Stephen Covey's book, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The saying means, “to begin today with the image, picture or paradigm of the end of your life as your framework of reference by which everything else is examined.” Today I hope to help you realize your potential and fulfill your goals with an eye on eternity.

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. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The most repeated word in these verses is prize. We read this word again in Philippians 3:14, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” The idea is literally an “upward call.” The word heaven is actually not mentioned. The upward call refers to the summons given to the winner to approach the elevated stand of the judge and receive his reward.

Sometimes we view the idea that heaven is the prize, but that word is never used in that way. What does the Bible call salvation — the gift of eternal life. It is freely offered and freely received by faith.

The Apostle Paul said these words to the Corinthians, “I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge — because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.” (1 Corinthians 1:4-6) These immature believers were the focus of the letter, and time and again Paul refers to eternity and receiving a prize so that they would begin to live wholeheartedly for Christ. They were saved, but many of them were not living out their faith.

Our theme verse: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

What are these rewards?

- * Approval - “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.” (verse 27) The root word is translated, “approve.” The word used here is the opposite of approved, which meant that Paul was concerned about missing Christ's approval. Some might suggest if I'm saved, God approves me. But the actual language of the Bible is that the Lord accepts me as his child by faith. If you are a good parent you will always accept your children, but does that mean you always approve of them? Of course not! What if one of your children was arrested for selling cocaine? You would still accept him, but you would not approve him. Last week, in our parable, the servant received the king's approval with these words, “Well done, good servant.”
- * An Account - “We do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (verse 25) This is a symbol of honor, of course, but it also is a picture of something made of a precious metal. Paul tells the believers to build with materials that lasts. “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, this work will be shown for what it is . . .” (1 Corinthians 3:12,13) The materials are symbols of what lasts. Like a crown, they are made of valuable materials. It reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-20, “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.” It seems that treasures are currently being reserved in heaven for you and will be presented as a reward of faithful service. Some have suggested something like an eternal trust fund, which you use to glorify God and serve him in heaven.
- * Authority - “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12) Again, Paul wants the Corinthians to have an eternal perspective. He keeps on challenging them to focus on what lasts. He wants them to envision themselves before the Lord one day, and be anticipating the joy and reward that awaits. He cites qualities that will be a part of eternity: faith, hope and love. This points to how they will live in eternity with Jesus.

Jesus told his disciples at the Last Supper that the servant would be the greatest in the kingdom, and since they had served with him, he said in Luke 22:29 & 30, “I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” We might not fully understand the language that Jesus is using, but we know that he said that those who were faithful with a few things on earth will be in charge of many things in heaven. Authority and purpose in eternity are absolutely evident through the teaching of Jesus.

Conclusion: There is an immature, disconnected group of people in Corinth. They have professed Christ and were destined for heaven. However, they were not applying themselves to a life that would lead to reward. Several times in the letter, Paul challenges them with the purpose to motivate them to live fully for Christ. The idea was that they would one day enjoy the rewards that are outlined in this teaching today. I hope this motivates you to live today fully for Christ.

Reflective Questions:

1. What are some rewards that we receive in this life? How do rewards motivate us? What are some rewards that you have received already?
2. If you are athletic, what do you know about training? What does training have to do with the Christian life? What does 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 say to you about how you should live your life?
3. What is the difference between the prize offered and the gift shared in Jesus? Do these differences make sense to you? What assurance do you have about the gift? What assurance do you have about the prize?
4. Which reward are you looking forward to the most? How are you assured of God's approval; building treasures in heaven; reigning with Christ?
5. What do you take away from this teaching today?

Reading Schedule for January 18 – 24, 2010

Do the names Jacob and Joseph ring a bell. Jacob was renamed Israel and his twelve sons were assigned as the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. His most famous son was Joseph, who was sold into slavery and became second in command to Pharaoh. These stories characterize the activity of God in carrying us through the valleys and peaks of life. I hope you are enjoying our beginning progress through the Book of Genesis and realizing the significance of being in God's Word everyday so that he might speak to you about the timeless principles of the Scriptures. In 2010 God is going to help us from front to end. I apologize for my quirky sayings. Please notice how God might be speaking to you through each of these stories and ask yourself how the Lord wants you to apply this scriptural truth that he brings to your attention.

January 18: **Genesis 28:10-22** – “He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.” (verse 19) I like the word Bethel. It was the title of the seminary I attended in St. Paul, Minnesota. Bethel means “house of God,” and we know that Jacob encountered the Lord in a special way, affirming to him God's plans for his life. Are there places or situations when God especially spoke to you? It is good to remember times when the Lord impresses his calling on your life. How would you summarize God's purpose for your life? When did this become most clear to you?

January 19: **Genesis 29:14-30** – “Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, ‘I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.’” (verse 18) Obviously you read that Laban tricked Jacob into promising that he would work for another seven years so that Jacob could actually receive the wife he longed for and loved, named Rachel. Jacob was known for his deception and here he is deceived by Laban. Sometimes our way of living can return to bite us. Oftentimes, the way that we live that is inconsistent with God's plan for us will come full-circle and someone else will behave that way towards us. Has that ever happened to you? What does the verse mean, “What one sows he will also reap.”?

January 20: **Genesis 32:1-33:16** – We are skipping some of the story of Jacob as he works for Laban, his father-in-law. In this passage, we find Jacob returning to his homeland. The key point in this story about Jacob returning and meeting his brother Esau, comes, in my opinion, when Jacob wrestles with God. “Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’” (verse 26) Jacob continued his wrestling match all night just to be blessed. It is a picture of prayer, in my opinion. Spiritual persistence is seeking after God in the midst of tough situations. Jacob did not want to enter into a confrontation with his brother without the help and blessing of God. How eager are you for God's work in your life? How does your prayer life reflect your hunger for God? If prayer equals blessing, how much would God be able to bless you?

January 21: **Genesis 37:1-36** – It is time to meet Joseph. We are already connecting with this significant character in the Bible after just three short weeks in the New Year. What part of this story stands out to you? “Judah said to his brothers, ‘What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.’ His brothers agreed.” (vv. 26&27) Joseph's life was held in the balance. He could have easily been murdered, knowing the attitude of his brothers and the situation that was available to them. However, God spoke to Judah and Judah's idea was good to everyone. I am drawn to the fact that God was watching over Joseph in the most difficult of situations. His life was protected by God. The Lord had plans for Joseph and no one could get in the way of his plans. How does that story encourage you? What does it say to you about the inevitable reality of people opposing you? How do you see Joseph trusting God even when he is treated so poorly? What do you learn from this introduction to Joseph's life?

January 22: **Genesis 39:1-23** – “Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’” (vv. 6&7) If you had only read this verse and not the rest of the story, you would expect that Joseph would give in. In every TV show or movie that you might be watching, that would be the normal course of events. A flirting woman that is trying to seduce a man leads to fornication. That's what the Bible calls it. We are not talking just about an affair; we are talking about sin. Sexual sin is not just an issue between two consenting adults, it is an act of disobedience against God. Joseph knew that. He kept his relationship with God in the forefront of his decisions. Wanting to please God more than anyone else led Joseph to say, “No.” Do you want God's approval more than anything else? Is he the one that you aim to please above all? Why or why not? Be honest with yourself. Give specific reasons why you believe you want to obey God the most.

January 23: **Genesis 40:1-23** – “Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.” (vv. 20-22) It happened just like Joseph had predicted. Joseph was led by God to interpret the dream. But even though he was empowered by God to do something supernatural, the cupbearer did not remember him. Joseph's faith would again be tested as he would continue to be confined to prison. Did you know that Joseph was in Egypt from age 17 until age 30, and most of those years were in prison? What do you appreciate about Joseph so far? What does this story say about our main character?

January 24: **Genesis 41:1-40** – “The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.” (verse 37) Pharaoh recognized that Joseph was a man “in whom is the spirit of God.” How did Pharaoh recognize that Joseph was a man of God? What other characteristics do you notice in Joseph that would point to the fact that he was a man that had a relationship with the living God? God's favor caused Joseph to rise up to positions of authority and responsibility. The thirteen years of service and being a prisoner helped train Joseph to be ready to serve God and others with humility. How do people see God in you? In what ways does the Lord shine through your life? How could you become a clearer reflection of the presence of God in your life?

Prayers: Pray for the Women's Breakfast and Lynda McCarthy's testimony this Saturday morning as women gather in fellowship and prayer. Pray for our Elders as we conclude with the financial summary of 2009. Ask God to give our leaders wisdom and direction. Pray for Sunday's message about being an overcoming Christian.