

Proof of Love

Suffering, Tests, and Temptation Part 6
James 1:12 11-16-2014

Summary: The people who persevere to the end have reason to be happy because when it's all done they will be honored with the life of God because their persevering was proof of love for God. Use love for God as your motive for persevering.

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James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

The Promise: Life for Love

We have been studying through the book of James and we come today to 1:12. This is one of those verses that is so rich and jammed full of truth that we won't make it any further today than this one verse. So, whatever kind of Bible you have, take a look at the last phrase in verse 12.

...the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

I am going to argue in a minute that **crown of life** refers to the reward of eternal life with God in heaven. And if that's correct, then this little phrase is James' shorthand version of the gospel. God made a promise. He promised that He would give the **crown of life** to one certain group of people: **those who love him**. James says something very similar in chapter 2.

James 2:5 Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

God has promised some things to those who love Him. That is James' way of describing the saved. They are the people who love God.

Fundamental, Yet Not Widely Known

Isn't it an amazing thing to think that nothing is more fundamental to our duty as human beings than loving God? That is the essential core of what God requires of us. The most fundamental command is not that we do things for Him, or give things to Him, or that we behave according to a certain religious code of conduct. It is that we love Him. An expert in the Old Testament law came up to Jesus and asked Him, "Of all the hundreds of commands in the Bible, which is the most important?" Jesus said, "That's easy – love God." Love God – that is not only the most important command – it is the summary of all the commands. When you do that; you have done it all.

The reason I say that is amazing is that even though Jesus made that crystal clear, very few people in our society have the slightest clue about this. Do you ever run into an unbeliever who has loving God even on their radar? Walk up to a random person on the street and say, "What is the main thing God requires of us?" and see if anyone even comes close to saying, "To love Him." Most of them will probably say "To love one another." Or they might say, "To serve Him" or "Go to church," "be a nice person," or something like that. But never anything about loving God. When people confess their sin, you hear things like, "I've been selfish, I've hurt people, I've lied, cheated, stolen..." but when do you ever hear some unbeliever broken down in tears of remorse saying, "I haven't loved God"?

Why? Why doesn't the world know this is God's requirement? It is not like Jesus is an unknown figure. And it's not like Jesus taught this in some obscure, veiled parable that is really hard to understand. He just came right out and said, "The greatest command is to love God." That is recorded in Matthew, in Mark, and in Luke.

And even if Jesus hadn't said it, it really is not all that hard to figure out from the Old Testament. In Exodus 20 (the chapter that gives the 10 Commandments), God promises to show love to a thousand generations of those who love Him (Ex.20:6).

Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The Jews understood the importance of that. They quoted that verse multiple times a day every day. They knew that was basic – probably because it is repeated so many times. Just in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 11:1 Love the LORD your God

11:13 faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God

11:22 carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow--to love the LORD your God

7:9 he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him

19:9 carefully follow all these laws I command you today--to love the LORD your God

30:16 I command you today to love the LORD your God

When Moses, the lawgiver, summed up all the things God was commanding, over and over he said, "Basically all this amounts to loving God." And what will God do for those who love Him? What is the outcome of loving God? Life!

Deuteronomy 30:19 ...I have set before you life and death ... Now choose life, so that ... 20 you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life

If you love God, He will reward you with even more love for Him, and with spiritual life.

After the conquest of the Promised Land Joshua gave instructions to the people:

Joshua 22:5 Be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God

“Moses repeated this until he was blue in the face, but in case you forgot, let me just remind you of the bottom line: love God.”

Then when Joshua reached the end of his life and was about to die, at age 110, his last words to the leaders of Israel are recorded in Joshua 23.

Joshua 23:11 be very careful to love the LORD your God.

That phrase **very careful** (your Bible might say **be very diligent**, or **take diligent heed**) is a very strong phrase. These are his dying words - “Work really, really, really hard at making absolutely sure that whatever you do, you love God.”

1 Corinthians 2:9 No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him

Psalms 5:11 Spread your protection over ... those who love your name that they may rejoice in you.

Psalms 31:23 Love the LORD, all his saints!

Psalms 116:1 I love the LORD

1 Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him.

Why? Because loving God is the only thing that matters for a human being. Nothing you can do is better. And nothing you can do is more evil than failing to love God. There is no more vile, wicked, evil sin than failing to love God. There is no sin that deserves more severe punishment than failing to love God. I saw a news story last week about someone who systematically tortured a 3-year-old boy for three days and then beat him to death. When I read something like that the anger in my heart toward that person, and the grief and sorrow I feel are almost more than I can take. Such wickedness! Doing that to a 3-year-old boy is beyond comprehension, but failing to love God is even worse. Love for God is the measure of all morality – all right and wrong – all good and evil.

That is why the very first sermon series we ever did here at Agape was a 13-part series on “Loving God with All Your Heart.” It is why we named this church Agape – the Greek word for love. God first loved us, and we are to respond by loving Him – that is the bottom line.

You could never be good enough to work your way to heaven. If you gave all your money to the poor, and you devoted your life to helping people who are down and out, and you memorized the entire Bible, preached sermons, lead millions of people to faith in Christ, eliminated world hunger and war and crime, and died from diving on a grenade to save your buddies – you still would not be good enough to deserve to go to heaven. None of us could ever earn our way to heaven, but if you love God, He will give you what you don't deserve. Why? Because part of love is trust. And if you trust God more than you trust yourself, God will accept that as if it were a perfect life. The only person who ever earned the right to have God's favor and reward was Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless, perfect life. And if you trust Jesus Christ more than you trust yourself, God will credit Jesus' perfection to your account, and He will associate you so closely with Jesus that the same love God the Father has for God the Son also lands on you. However much delight the Father has in His Son Jesus, that is how much delight He has in you (if you have faith – you trust Him more than you trust yourself).

“Does that mean I earn God's favor by loving and trusting Him?”

No, because even your love and trust are gifts from Him. It is God who enables your heart to love Him. When you believe, God gives you a new heart – one that is capable of knowing Him personally and really loving Him. Before that, it is not even possible to love Him. So whenever someone truly loves God, you know that person is saved and on his way to heaven because no one can love God unless they have been born again through trusting God.

So that is how it all works. Believe the truth about God, trust Jesus more than you trust yourself; trust Him enough to follow His way rather than your own way, and when you do that He will give you a new heart – one that is capable of really loving Him – really taking delight in Him and enjoying His presence and desiring Him and having the cravings of your soul satisfied by Him.

But James does not explain all that. He just reminds us that God made a promise to all those who love Him. Life for Love – that is the promise. When you get to the end of your life and God looks back and says, “Yep. This person loved Me” – he will be given fullness of life.

Life

I say fullness because what we have now is partial. The promise of life is the promise of rich, full, abundant, eternal life from God in heaven. Life as life was meant to be. We have talked before about the ingredients of life. Life refers to health, strength, growth, progress, vitality, energy, motivation, joy – all of that is what makes life life. Right now we have little tastes of those things – mixed with large doses of the components of death (sickness, weakness, lethargy, stagnation, decline, despair, etc.). Imagine having those components of life without any of the components of death.

Someday Jesus is going to return and God will re-create this place and there will be a new sky and a new earth. And in that new world, when you get up to start your day, you will be filled with energy and motivation. You’ll be thinking, “Man, I can’t wait! I can’t wait to get started today!” – and it will always feel like that. In fact, more and more as time goes on. Your body will work perfectly. It will be so much fun doing things that God gives you to do. Your career will be on such an exciting track. You will just be amazed at what you are capable of. You will feel invigorated and happy and full of life – every day. You will have the very life of God in you.

And you will keep making more and more progress, year after year – forever. You’ll keep breaking records and hitting new highs and achieving greater things than you have ever done before. You’ll keep discovering new marvels. Can you imagine the places God will create for us to explore? A few weeks ago my family came across an old abandoned mine shaft, and we had so much fun exploring that. And all it was was a dark, empty cave that went nowhere. Can you imagine exploring the new earth? I want to be the Lewis and Clark of that place, because part of life is discovery.

Another huge part of life is relationships. Have you ever had someone you loved so much that if you go somewhere, no matter where, if that person is there you know you will have a good time? It could be your least favorite place or event, but if that person is going to be there, you are actually looking forward to going. That is the way it will be with everyone you know in the new earth. You will love them so much, and they will love you, and there won’t be any hindrances to love, so you will be filled with delight and joy anytime you are around anyone.

You will also have something that Jesus described as treasure or riches. There will be things in the new earth that you will have that, when Jesus wanted to describe what they will be like, the term that came to His mind was “riches.” So it will be kind of like having lots of money here in this life. Does that mean there will be money in heaven? I don’t know. I just know there will be something that Jesus wanted us to think of as being like money, and is much better than money in this world. (And money in this world can really be a lot of fun.) Think of some things you can do in this world if you have unlimited money. If you can imagine some version of those things minus any trace of the fall or the curse, that is the sort of thing we will have in the new earth.

All of that is packed into that one little word: **life**. That is what God gives to everyone who truly loves Him.

“But how do I know if I truly love Him? What is the measurement of love for God?”

That is where this verse really gets fascinating.

The Form: Beatitude

To answer that question we need to have a clear understanding of the structure of this verse. If you want the Christianese jargon, this verse is in the form of what they call a beatitude. So let’s talk for a minute about what a beatitude is, and how they work.

A beatitude is a statement that starts with the word *blessed*. Like...

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

You see them all over the Bible. There are probably close to 100 or so in Scripture. Jesus started the Sermon on the Mount with a whole pile of them – blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, etc.

The word blessed, when it comes at the beginning of a sentence, basically means, you have a reason to smile. You are a person who has a reason to celebrate. And the rest of the sentence explains two things: who has that reason to smile, and what that reason is. Imagine you are standing in line at Dairy Queen or Starbucks or wherever you like to go, and the manager comes out and says, “Whoever happens to be in the very back of the line right now should have a big smile on his face.” And everyone says, “Why?” And he says, “Because that person gets to come to the front of the line, and his whole order is on me today.” That’s a beatitude. Someone has a reason to smile – who is it? The guy in the back of the line. What is the reason he should smile? Because he is getting his order free. To put that in Biblical lingo: “Blessed is the man who is standing in the back of the line, for he will be getting his order for free.”

Now, think for a minute about the purpose of a beatitude. Why did God put roughly 100 of them in the Bible? What are they supposed to accomplish? Back to the Starbucks thing - imagine that’s you in the back of the line. Before the manager came out, you had no idea that you had a reason to smile. You had one, but you didn’t know about it. So he comes out and tells you that you do have a reason to smile, and then explains what that reason is.

Could you ever picture the manager coming out and saying, “Happy is the person who is in the front of the line, because he doesn’t have to wait any longer”? No. Why not? Because that’s obvious. They guy in the front of the line already knows he’s got it made. It is obvious to everyone he has a reason to be smiling. We don’t need a manager to come out and inform us about the advantages of being in front. You see, the purpose of a beatitude is to let us know about categories of people who have a reason to smile, but that reason isn’t obvious. They have cause to celebrate, but they don’t know it.

When Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn,” – that’s not very obvious. Why should I smile if I’m mourning?” But then you hear the rest of the beatitude: Blessed are those who mourn (over their sin now) because they, and they alone will be comforted by God.” If you are going to be comforted by God, you are in great shape. That is a reason to smile.

So a beatitude is a statement that says, “Believe it or not – if you are in this situation you have a reason to celebrate,” and then it goes on to give the reason why.

So the reason for the beatitudes in the Bible is to cause us to desire to be in those categories. If the manager comes out once a day and delivers a beatitude, “Happy is anyone wearing a hat, because they each get a \$100 bill.” Then the next day, “Happy is everyone born in February, because they each get a new car.” Every day it’s something else. Pretty soon you realize that as soon as you see the manager come out and say, “Happy is the person who...,” you are just hoping that you are in the category that gets the prize.

That is exactly why God puts beatitudes in the Bible. He wants us to want to be in those categories. Any time you see a beatitude in the Bible, “Blessed is the one who...,” – whatever follows is something that God wants you to see and think, “I want to be that guy!”

Who Gets the Prize?

So when you read James 1:12, God wants you to read it and think, “Oh, I want to be that guy!” So, who is that guy? What is the category of people who get this amazing prize of the crown of life? It is not people wearing a hat or born in February or standing in line – who is it? In most beatitudes the answer to that question is super easy and straightforward. Blessed are the poor in spirit, or blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, or blessed are the persecuted. But James’ beatitude is more complex. He describes the category of people who get this blessing in three different ways. Look at the verse. Who is it

who is blessed and has reason to celebrate? Can you see the three different descriptions? First it is those who persevere. But then it is the one who passes the test. And then at the end it is the one who loves God.

All three are describing the same group of people. These are the people who are blessed because they will get the crown of life. But they are described three different ways. And the key to understanding this verse is understanding the relationship between those three descriptions.

1) The One Who Perseveres

Blessed in the man who perseveres under trial

James is calling to mind the discussion from verses 3-4. He is using all the same terms – trials, testing, and perseverance.

Final Perseverance

But there is a difference. Back in verses 3-4, James talked about persevering through individual trials as they come up in your life. In verse 12, he is looking at your whole Christian life in one, single snapshot. James is jumping ahead to the end of your life. That phrase translated when he has **stood the test** is an aorist participle., so it is literally **having become approved**. It is done. You passed the test. Not one, individual test – *the* test. This life is one, giant test. And you pass it by making it all the way to the end with your faith still intact. Back in verses 3-4 we learned how to persevere through the individual trials of life (so that we didn't cave in and give in to sin when we face hardship), and the result of living a life of persevering through individual trials is that you end up with final perseverance. You make it to the finish line. You don't give up your faith. You are not like Hymenaeus and Alexander and others in 1 Timothy 1 who shipwrecked their faith. You persevere to the end.

Suffering shipwrecks the faith of a lot of people. They are trusting Christ, following His way – but then crushing, devastating hardship comes into their life and their faith is smashed to pieces on the rocks. They cannot bring themselves to believe in a God who behaves the way God behaves (or the way they think God is behaving). They are no longer willing to trust a God like that, and so they don't. But James is saying, "Blessed is the man who isn't like that. Blessed is the one who gets to the finish line still trusting Jesus enough to follow His way. Blessed is that man, because he has passed the test."

2) The Approved

If you can remember when we studied verse 3, we found that this word for test was used for the testing of precious metals. It is a testing process that also refines. You put gold in fire and two things happen: 1) you find out if it is real gold, and 2) it becomes more valuable because the impurities melt away. Suffering does the same thing to our hearts. It reveals true faith, and at the same time it refines us and burns away impurities of sin.

James uses the same word for testing here in verse 12, but this time the emphasis is not as much on the testing process as much as on the outcome. It is really an interesting word. The word is *dokimos*, and it means: to be tested and approved – kind of like our phrase "tried and true." Something has been tried (tested), and found to be true. And once it is found to be genuine, it is accepted rather than being rejected. The opposite of this word is *adokimos*. *Adokimos* means rejected as worthless. So whenever you see the word *dokimos*, sometimes the testing part is emphasized and other times the approved part is emphasized. Back in verse 3 the focus was on the testing process, and the refining effect that came from it. Here the emphasis is on the approved part.

So what James is saying is that the suffering is a testing process. And when you persevere to the end of it, you pass the test and you are approved. Millions of people pray a prayer and invite Jesus into their life and they think that's the end of it. They think, "The matter is settled." But that is not what the Bible says. The matter isn't settled until after the testing process. You come to the point in your life where you bow the knee and say, "OK, I trust you, Lord." And God takes all the people who do that and runs them

all through a battery of tests. Those who pass the testing process go to heaven and those who do not are condemned.

3) Test of Love

So if you persevere through trials all the way to the grave, you have reason to celebrate because you passed the test and you will be given the crown of life. But that still leaves one more question: what is it that is being tested? If you put gold in fire you are testing to find out if it is really gold. When God puts one of us through a lifetime of trials and hardships, what is it that He is testing? The answer is at the end of the verse. The crown of life goes only to one category of people: **those who love Him.**

That is what is being tested – your love for God. God will render a verdict on your life on Judgment Day, and it will go one of two ways: either “This person loved Me,” or, “This person did not love Me.” And the way that will be determined is by whether you persevered to the end.

So do you see why James has such a complex beatitude? He describes the blessed person three ways because all three parts are essential. The prize goes to those who persevere because that persevering is how you pass the test, and the test is designed to test your love for God. God approves of those who love Him, and that love is seen in perseverance.

Persevere by Loving God

That is why perseverance is so important! It is a function of loving God. Love for God is what causes perseverance. If you want to know how to make it through suffering, here’s how you do it: love God. That will make you persevere, because if you love God, all suffering will do is drive you closer to Him, not away from Him. Two weeks ago the Garretts got word that they lost their daughter. The following Sunday they were here in church. Why? Why come worship the God who took your daughter away at age 30? Because they love God. They know He is good. They are like Job, who said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” They are like Peter who, when Jesus asked, “Are you going to walk away, too?” he said, “Where else are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life.” The one who loves God says, “If I have to be tortured and killed then so be it, but walking away from the Source of true life is absolutely not an option. Where would I go? There’s nothing else for me in this Universe.”

The person who loves God sees suffering for what it is. Suffering is nothing more than lacking something that can only be found in God. When you lose some thing or person that made you happy, the person who loves God thinks, “If my problem is lack of happiness, the only solution to that is more closeness with God.” God is the only source of joy, peace, strength, life, health, happiness, wisdom, guidance, virtue, righteousness, well-being, safety, security, love – all the things we are trying to get out of our treasures. So when we lose our treasures, it makes us run to God all the more. Every time I lose something that was making me happy, I need God all that much more because He is the only Source of happiness.

But the person who appears to be loving and trusting God, when in reality he is only using God to get the things he really loves and trusts in – when God doesn’t deliver, he will walk away. That is why suffering is such a great test of love.

So when you suffer, love God. Persevere. Don’t give in to sin. Don’t grumble or complain. Don’t get angry. Don’t give in to discouragement. Don’t despair. Don’t doubt. Love God. If devastating tragedy strikes, love God. Run to Him, not away from Him. If you stub your toe, love God. If you get a flat tire in sub-zero temperatures on your way to a really important meeting – love God. When you persevere through a trial, don’t persevere because you are tough. Don’t persevere because you want to show everyone what a great Christian you are. Don’t persevere so you can have a martyr complex. Persevere because a heart that loves God has no other choice but to keep loving God. Persevere because God is delightful and full of grace and mercy and love and wisdom and power and patience and glory and strength, and He alone gives joy and peace and hope and life. Persevere because He alone can answer prayer and forgive sins and grant eternal salvation. Persevere because He sacrificed His Son to pay the

penalty for your sins so that you could be forgiven and clean before Him. Persevere because there is no other food and drink that can satisfy the cravings of your soul.

Crown

If you persevere for those reasons, you pass the test and you will receive **the crown of life**. Back in that time they gave crowns like we give medals. If you won the Olympics, or you were a hero at war, instead of pinning something on your chest they would put something on your head. So the idea is that it will be a great honor. God Himself will bestow a great honor on you. And what will that honor be? Life.

So if it is life, why not just say life? Why crown of life? It is because God wants us to see it as Him awarding something to us in light of some achievement. It is an achievement – you persevered to the end.

Something to Strive for

Now, please don't misunderstand. That is not to say you earned the medal. You will be awarded this medal based on what you did, but you still will not deserve it because what you did to get it was done by Christ through you. It was not you alone, in your own goodness, but it was Christ working through you. All the love in your heart for God comes from Christ. So it is not something we deserve, but God does want us to think of it as being like getting a medal because God wants to motivate us to strive for it.

It Is Worth It!

So that may be one reason it is cast in terms of a crown (medal). Another reason may be this – God wants us to see it as a direct result of persevering. We need that when the suffering gets intense. We need to know it will be worth it. Have you ever wondered if it is really worth it to obey Christ? Have you ever been like the psalmist in Psalm 73 whose faith was starting to slip and he said this:

Psalm 73:13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

He obeyed God and stayed away from sin and the result was poverty and suffering while wicked people around him were thriving, and he says, "I obeyed for this? I gave up the pleasures of sin for this? What a waste." But then he recovered later in the psalm when he got to thinking about eternity.

Whatever you are going through right now – persevere. God is saying, "It's worth it. I will make it worth your while." And when you love God so much that any reward from His hand is motivation for you, and you trust God so much that when He says, "I'll make it worth your while," that is all you need to hear – you will go through any suffering for that – that honors God.

Conclusion: Persevere!

Some of you have been taught that if you love God now, then continuing to love Him all the way until the end will just be automatic. You don't have to concern yourself with the possibility of your faith failing – perseverance is just automatic. That is false doctrine – don't ever fall for that. Listen to the warnings our Lord gave us for times of trouble.

Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold

That is a real danger. The Second Coming will not happen until that great apostasy. And so we are warned again and again by Jesus, by the Apostles, and in the book of Revelation to make sure we persevere all the way to the end. In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, Jesus says different things to each church, but there is one thing He says to every church. To every one of them He stresses the importance of being an overcomer – a victor. The definition of an overcomer is in 2:26. An overcomer is one who does the will of Jesus Christ until the end. So He warns all the churches at the outset – big

time trouble and tribulation and suffering are coming - make sure you overcome. And He gives each one a different incentive to overcome, all based on some aspect of His promise of life.

Revelation 2:1 Ephesus ... I know your deeds ... 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ... To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life

2:8 Smyrna 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

2:12 Pergamum ... You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, ... To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it

2:18 Thyatira 19 I know your deeds, your ... perseverance, ... 25 hold on to what you have until I come. 26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations

3:1 Sardis 3 If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief ... 4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. ... 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life

3:14 Laodicea 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

3:7 Philadelphia ... I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 10 you have kept my command to endure patiently ... 11 Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

That is the message of our Lord to us, His church. Persevere. Don't give up. Overcome. Do it to get what He promises, because He is worthy of your desire. He is worthy of your enjoyment. He is worthy of your love.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 4:14 we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. What kinds of trials are the most difficult for you to persevere (endure without reverting to sinful responses) through?
2. Which trial in your life is most in need of you taking the "persevere through loving God" approach right now?

Appendix: Good and Bad Reward-Seeking

Even though Scripture constantly commands us to live for reward, many Christians still resist the idea because it just sounds selfish to them. If that is you, it might help to realize that there is a selfish kind of seeking reward that dishonors the person giving the reward, and there is a loving, honoring way to seek reward. There is a way you can do it that dishonors the other person and there is a way that honors that person. For example, suppose a woman calls her husband at work and says, “If you come home early tonight and spend the evening with me, I will make you the happiest man in the world tonight.” If he hears that and gets all excited and five minutes later he is walking in the front door – that honors her. That’s not selfishness. It’s love. If she calls and says, “The kids are staying at a friend’s house so if you cancel your meetings tonight, then we can spend some time alone” – if that reward motivates him, the wife is honored because the reward is her company, and she feels honored and loved if he desires that. That is exactly the response the wife wants. What she doesn’t want is for him to say, “You’ll make me the happiest man in the world? That doesn’t motivate me one bit. I’m not selfish. I will come home early, but not because I’m looking forward to it. Only out of sheer, unconditional, self-sacrificial service to you. It’s not something I want to do or desire in any way, but I’ll force myself to do it just because it’s my nature to be loving and generous and magnanimous.” That kind of an answer would dishonor her. She wants him to be motivated by the reward she offered, because desiring that reward means he desires her. So it is evidence of love.

There is a bad kind of reward seeking, however. For example, suppose she says, “Would you come home early to spend time with me?” and he says, “No, I don’t really want to do that,” and she says, “If you do it, I’ll make you a steak dinner,” and he says, “OK, I guess that’s worth it.” That would dishonor her. Why? Because it shows that he doesn’t desire her. He desires food, but he doesn’t desire her company.

So the good kind of reward seeking is when your desire for the reward comes from your love for the person. If you invite me over to your house, and my reward is I get to enjoy your company for a few hours – that’s the good kind because that reward only means something if I love you and trust you to be good company. So if I am excited about coming over for that reason, that honors you and it is not selfishness. If someone dislikes you, then the reward of being around you all evening is no reward at all. If you say, “Hey Darrell, would you like to come spend the evening with us?” and I say, “I’ll do it for \$100,” that would be the bad kind of reward seeking, because my desire for the money isn’t an outgrowth of my love for you.

So seeking reward is a good, honoring thing if it is an outgrowth of your love for the person. And it is also a good, honoring thing if it is an outgrowth of your trust in that person. I know a guy whose boss told him, “If you learn this new skill on your own time – off the clock, I will make it worth your while.” He didn’t give the slightest clue what that meant – whether it would be a huge raise, or a pat on the back. Learning this new skill was a major commitment. It took all his free time, Saturdays, evenings – for quite a while. The guy did it. Why? Because he trusted his boss. He didn’t know what “I’ll make it worth your while,” meant exactly, but he knew it would be something really good. He trusted his boss so much that he didn’t feel like he was taking a risk by doing all that extra work. If you trust someone like that, that honors them. If you say, “First you have to tell me exactly what the reward will be. Otherwise I’m not doing it because for all I know I’ll spend weeks and weeks doing that work and at the end of the year you’ll slip a \$5 gift card to MacDonald’s in with my paycheck.” How would that make your boss feel? Dishonored, right?

“Really – that’s what you think of me?”

You are saying, “I don’t trust you to be generous or good.”

So all that to say there are some bad, selfish, dishonoring ways to seek reward. And maybe the people who are so against living for reward are thinking of those kinds, and that is why they are so against the idea. But we need to understand that there is a good kind of reward-seeking, and when we do that it

honors God because it shows we love Him, desire Him, and trust Him. And when that is the case, the more we motivated we are by those rewards the more we honor and please God.

So why does the Bible over and over and over command us to live for rewards? It is because the rewards God promises are always the good kind and never the bad kind.