

YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID

LIVING IN THE ALREADY BUT NOT YET



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INTRUDERS IN GOD'S GOOD GARDEN

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PREFACE — LIVING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

The Bible is not a collection of disconnected stories.

It is one story.

From beginning to end, Scripture reveals a single unfolding reality: God created humanity for life with Him, humanity fell into rebellion, and God began a long and patient work of restoration.

In the early volumes of this series, we explored that story.

God's Good News walks through the great arc of Scripture — from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem. It shows how the Bible is not merely moral teaching or religious history, but the account of God reclaiming what was lost when sin entered His good creation.

Another book in this series, *Grace, Faith & Salvation*, focuses on the hinge of that story. Humanity could not repair the fracture caused by sin. The Law revealed the problem but could not remove it. The cross of Christ became the turning point — where justice and mercy met, and where the way back to God was opened through grace received by faith.

Those books explain **how redemption became possible**.

But they leave an important question.

What does life look like now?

The World After the Fall

The majority of books in the **Intruders series** examine what entered God's creation after the fall.

Sin.

Disease.

Pride.

Death.

Broken systems.
Distorted desires.

These are not part of God's original design.

They are intruders.

They are the consequences of humanity's rebellion and the corruption that followed.

Every sorrow, every injustice, every temptation we experience exists because the world is no longer what it was meant to be.

The Garden was good.

The world we inhabit now is fractured.

And yet redemption has already begun.

The Already — But Not Yet

Through Christ's death and resurrection, the Kingdom of God has entered the world.

Forgiveness is real.

The Spirit of God dwells within believers.

New life has begun.

But the world is not yet restored.

Sin still tempts.

Death still intrudes.

Brokenness still surrounds us.

Scripture describes this tension as living between two realities.

The Kingdom is already present.

But it is not yet complete.

Believers live in that space.

We are citizens of a coming Kingdom while still walking through a broken world.

The Purpose of This Book

This book focuses on how followers of Christ are meant to live in that tension.

Jesus gave commands that are often admired but rarely examined closely.

Seek first the Kingdom.

Love your neighbor.

Humble yourself.

Deny yourself daily.

Forgive as you have been forgiven.

Guard your words.

Make disciples.

Fear God rather than man.

Store treasure in heaven.

These commands are not theoretical ideals.

They are instructions for people living between the first coming of Christ and His return.

They are instructions for those living in the **already — but not yet.**

A Life of Faithful Stewardship

Because the Kingdom has begun, believers do not live passively.

We have been entrusted.

Entrusted with truth.

Entrusted with time.

Entrusted with influence.

Jesus often described this stewardship in parables — especially the parable of the talents. The Master departs for a time, entrusting resources to His servants. When He returns, He settles accounts.

The Christian life exists in that interval.

We are not waiting idly.

We are investing faithfully.

Until the Garden Is Restored

One day Christ will return.

The intruders will be removed.

Death will be defeated.

The Garden will be restored in the New Jerusalem.

Until that day, believers live faithfully in a world that is both redeemed and broken.

Already rescued.

Not yet home.

This book is about learning to live in that space — with clarity, courage, humility, and hope.

Because the King has already come.

And He is coming again.

INTRODUCTION — YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID

There are truths in Scripture that comfort.

And there are truths that confront.

We gladly memorize the promises.

We frame the assurances.

We cling to grace.

But there are commands — clear, direct, unavoidable — that we often soften, reinterpret, or quietly sidestep.

Jesus did not speak vaguely.

He did not invite casual admiration.

He called for allegiance.

He did not say:

Consider this.

He said:

Seek first.

Love.

Humble yourself.

Deny yourself.

Forgive.

Guard your words.

Make disciples.

Fear God.

Store treasure in heaven.

Be ready.

These are not peripheral instructions.

They are central to discipleship.

Not Legalism — But Loyalty

Let this be clear from the beginning.

Salvation is by grace alone.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith... not a result of works.”
— Ephesians 2:8–9

No one earns redemption.

No one secures heaven through effort.

The cross is sufficient.

But Scripture does not stop at verse 9.

It continues:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”
(Ephesians 2:10)

We are not saved by works.

But we are absolutely saved for works.

Obedience does not purchase salvation.

It proves allegiance.

The Danger of Comfortable Christianity

In every generation, there is a temptation to soften hard edges.

To reduce discipleship to attendance.

To replace obedience with agreement.

To equate belief with maturity.

But Jesus warned about that.

In Gospel of Matthew 7, He speaks of those who say, “Lord, Lord,” yet are unknown to Him.

In Gospel of Luke 6:46, He asks:

“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

That question still stands.

Hard Truth Is Loving Truth

A physician who withholds diagnosis is not kind.

A shepherd who ignores wolves is not gentle.

A Savior who commands obedience is not cruel.

He is loving.

Hard truth is not meant to crush.

It is meant to clarify.

To awaken.

To align.

When Jesus says, “Deny yourself,” He is not diminishing joy.

He is redirecting it.

When He says, “Forgive,” He is not minimizing pain.

He is freeing hearts from bitterness.

When He says, “Fear God,” He is not cultivating terror.

He is restoring proper perspective.

When He says, “Store treasure in heaven,” He is not forbidding provision.

He is protecting us from misplaced hope.

The Theme of This Book

This book is structured simply.

Each major command is explored in two parts:

First — what Jesus actually said, in context.

Second — what obedience looks like in real life.

Not theoretical.

Not abstract.

Concrete.

Because discipleship is lived.

Each chapter builds toward a sobering conclusion:

You have been entrusted.

Time.

Truth.

Opportunity.

And one day, you will give account.

Not for salvation — that was secured at the cross.

But for stewardship.

Almost Is Not Enough

We live in a culture of approximation.

Almost disciplined.

Almost committed.

Almost surrendered.

But almost obedient is still disobedient.

Jesus did not give “almost” for us.

He gave fully.

And He calls us to follow fully.

Not perfectly.

But faithfully.

A Word of Hope

If this feels weighty, it should.

But it is not written to produce fear of condemnation.

It is written to produce seriousness of devotion.

The same Christ who commands also empowers.

The same Lord who evaluates also gives grace.

The Spirit of God does not call you to obedience and leave you alone.

He indwells you.

Strengthens you.

Corrects you.

Restores you when you fail.

This is not a book about earning heaven.

It is a book about living like those who are going there.

Read Slowly

Do not rush.

Examine.

Pray.

Let Scripture confront and comfort.

Ask difficult questions.

Invite the Spirit to search motives.

These pages are not meant to impress.

They are meant to refine.

Because one day, we will stand before Christ.

And on that day, what mattered most will be clear.

Better to see clearly now.

TRUTH ONE – SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

Chapter 1

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“God wants you happy.”

“God wants you successful.”

“Just put God somewhere in your life.”

“Balance is the key.”

But Jesus did not say that.

He said:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

— Matthew 6:33

To understand the force of that command, we must understand where and why it was spoken.

The Setting

This statement comes in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5–7.

Jesus is not speaking to pagans.

He is speaking to disciples.

He has already said:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit.
- Blessed are the meek.
- You are the salt of the earth.

- You are the light of the world.

Then He turns to anxiety.

Food.

Clothing.

Daily provision.

First-century Jews lived under Roman occupation. Most lived modestly. Many lived day-to-day. Survival was not theoretical.

Jesus does not minimize their needs.

He says:

“Do not be anxious about your life...” (Matthew 6:25)

And then:

“You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

The issue is not bread.

The issue is mastery.

The Command Itself

“Seek first...”

The word seek implies active pursuit.

Intentional direction.

Not passive belief.

“First” does not mean included.

It does not mean prioritized occasionally.

It means preeminent.

Above comfort.

Above career.

Above security.

Above reputation.

Above political identity.

Above family ambition.

The kingdom of God is not merely heaven after death.

It is God's reign.

God's authority.

God's rule expressed in righteousness.

To seek His righteousness is to hunger for His will, not our own.

Why Jesus Said It

Because worry exposes divided allegiance.

When Jesus speaks about anxiety, He does not offer techniques.

He exposes masters.

“No one can serve two masters...” (Matthew 6:24)

The human heart cannot enthrone both comfort and Christ.

Anxiety often reveals what we fear losing most.

If we fear losing comfort more than losing obedience, comfort is our king.

Biblical Implications

This command echoes the entire story of Scripture.

In Eden, humanity sought autonomy instead of God's reign.

In the wilderness, Israel feared hunger and doubted God's provision (Deuteronomy 8).

In the monarchy, kings sought alliances instead of faithfulness.

The pattern repeats:

God's people trust provision more than the Provider.

The command "Seek first" confronts that ancient pattern.

It demands singular loyalty.

The Weight of the Command

Jesus does not present this as spiritual advice.

He presents it as the dividing line between faith and unbelief.

"For the Gentiles seek after all these things..." (Matthew 6:32)

The nations run after survival and security.

But disciples?

They are to run after the King.

This is not optional maturity.

It is basic discipleship.

What Is Demanded

Not belief alone.

Allegiance.

Reordered priorities.

Active pursuit.

Kingdom-first living will reorder:

Time

Money

Ambition
Conversation
Dreams
Fear

Anything that remains untouched has not been surrendered.

Chapter 2

Living It Out

The command is clear.

The question is: what does obedience look like?

What We Say vs. What We Seek

We say:

“God is first.”

But what absorbs our thought life?

What dominates our calendar?

What consumes our emotional energy?

Your true kingdom is revealed by what you cannot imagine losing.

Kingdom Rivals Today

Money — not necessarily wealth, but security.

Status — not necessarily fame, but recognition.

Politics — not engagement, but obsession.

Family success — not love, but legacy-building.

Comfort — not rest, but insulation from sacrifice.

None of these are inherently evil.

They become idols when they outrank obedience.

Practical Obedience

Seeking first looks like:

Daily structured time in Scripture and prayer — not when convenient, but as foundation.

Generosity that affects lifestyle.

Choosing local church commitment over isolation.

Discipling your children intentionally instead of outsourcing their formation.

Saying no to opportunities that weaken your spiritual life.

It may mean turning down income.

Relocating for faithfulness.

Being misunderstood.

It will certainly mean sacrifice.

Diagnostic Questions

If your income dropped, would your faith weaken?

If cultural approval vanished, would your convictions soften?

If obedience cost your advancement, would you still obey?

These are not hypothetical.

They reveal kings.

Eternal Perspective

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3 that each person's work will be tested by fire.

He writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”

And James reminds us in James 4:14 that life is a vapor.

This is not about earning salvation.

It is about stewarding time.

Saved — But For What?

Ephesians 2:8–9 makes it clear:

We are saved by grace through faith.

But verse 10 completes the thought:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”

Saved from sin.

Saved for purpose.

To seek first the Kingdom is not adding effort to grace.

It is walking in what grace produced.

The Hard Truth

Many believers want Christ as Savior.

Few want Him as King.

But He is not divided.

He does not offer redemption without reign.

If the Kingdom is not first, it is not first at all.

And almost first is not obedience.

TRUTH TWO — LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Chapter 3

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Just be nice.”

“Be tolerant.”

“Love means agreeing.”

“Love means not judging.”

But Jesus did not reduce love to sentiment.

He said:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

— Mark 12:31

To understand this command, we must see where it comes from — and why it carries such weight.

The Setting

In the Gospel of Mark 12, a scribe asks Jesus:

“Which commandment is the most important of all?”

Jesus answers with two:

1. Love the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 6:5).
2. Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

Then He says:

“There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Love of neighbor is not secondary morality.

It is central obedience.

It flows from loving God.

The vertical produces the horizontal.

The Old Testament Roots

This command comes from Leviticus 19.

That chapter is not sentimental.

It includes:

- Leave gleanings for the poor.
- Do not lie.
- Do not oppress.
- Do not hold wages back.
- Do not curse the deaf.
- Do not put a stumbling block before the blind.
- Do not hate your brother in your heart.

Then:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love is defined by covenant faithfulness.

Not emotion.

Not affirmation.

Action.

Justice.

Mercy.

Truth.

Jesus Expands the Definition

In the Gospel of Luke 10, Jesus is asked:

“And who is my neighbor?”

He responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The priest passes.

The Levite passes.

The outsider stops.

The neighbor is not defined by proximity.

It is defined by compassion expressed in cost.

The Samaritan:

- Approaches danger.
- Uses his own resources.
- Interrupts his schedule.
- Commits ongoing support.

Love crosses inconvenience.

What Love Is Not

It is not indifference.

It is not passive concern.

It is not social media sympathy.

It is not private agreement with someone's destruction.

The Apostle John writes in 1 John 3:17:

“If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in

Chapter 4

Living It Out — Love Your Neighbor

The command is clear.

The difficulty is not understanding it.

The difficulty is doing it.

Indifference Is Not Neutral

We often think love is the opposite of hatred.

But in Scripture, indifference is just as deadly.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Gospel of Luke 10), the priest did not attack the wounded man.

He passed by.

The Levite did not steal from him.

He crossed the road.

Their sin was not aggression.

It was absence.

We excuse ourselves because we did no harm.

But love is not defined by the harm we avoid.

It is defined by the good we pursue.

If you see need and choose convenience, that is not neutrality.

That is neglect.

Following Through on Promises

How often do we say:

“I’ll pray for you.”

And forget?

“I’ll help.”

And never show?

“I’ll be there.”

And cancel?

The book of James is blunt:

“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed... what good is that?” (James 2:15–16)

Words without follow-through are religious decoration.

Love keeps its word.

Love remembers.

Love shows up.

When you promise prayer — pray immediately.

When you promise help — schedule it.

When you commit — fulfill it.

Anything less is spiritual performance.

The Everyday Neighbor

The command is not abstract.

It is painfully ordinary.

In Deuteronomy 22, Israel was instructed:

If you see your brother's ox or sheep wandering, you must bring it back.

If you see his donkey fallen under its load, you must not ignore it.

“You shall not ignore it.”

That phrase cuts.

Modern version:

You see your neighbor's trash blown into the street.

You see the elderly widow's mailbox broken.

You see someone struggling with groceries.

You see a coworker unraveling under stress.

You drive by.

Because you are busy.

Love stops.

Love notices.

Love interrupts itself.

Prayer Is Love

To neglect prayer for others is not a small oversight.

It is a failure of love.

The Apostle Paul constantly writes of praying for believers by name (see 1 Thessalonians 1:2).

Intercession is not optional spirituality.

It is participation in someone else's burden.

If you know someone is struggling and you do not pray, you are not neutral.

You are withholding help available to you.

Love labors in prayer.

Love Speaks Truth

Love is not silent when destruction is near.

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” (Proverbs 27:6)

To watch someone drift into sin and say nothing is not compassion.

It is cowardice disguised as kindness.

Love risks awkwardness.

Love risks rejection.

Love values eternal well-being over temporary comfort.

Silence may protect your reputation.

It does not protect your neighbor.

Financial and Material Love

Scripture repeatedly ties love to tangible action.

1 John 3:18:

“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

If you have abundance and never share, something is misaligned.

If generosity never costs you, it may not be generosity.

Love loosens its grip.

The Harder Neighbors

Jesus expands the command further:

“Love your enemies.” (Matthew 5:44)

This is not sentimental affection.

It means:

Pray for them.

Refuse revenge.

Speak truth without hatred.

Desire their repentance, not their ruin.

This is supernatural.

And it exposes whether our love is rooted in God — or merely preference.

Diagnostic Questions

Do you follow through?

Do you remember commitments?

Do you interrupt your comfort?

Do you pray for specific people regularly?

Do you speak when silence would be easier?

Do you give when it costs?

Or do you mostly feel concern — and move on?

Why This Matters

Jesus says in Gospel of John 13:35:

“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Love is not an accessory virtue.

It is the evidence.

We can argue theology precisely.

We can attend church consistently.

We can speak eloquently.

But if we do not love in action, Scripture says we are noise (see 1 Corinthians 13).

The Hard Truth

Almost caring is not caring.

Almost praying is not praying.

Almost helping is not helping.

Almost loving is not loving.

Love is visible. Love is costly.

Love follows through.

And one day, we will stand before Christ.

Not to answer for how strongly we felt —

But for what we did.

TRUTH THREE—HUMBLE YOURSELF

Chapter 5

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Believe in yourself.”

“Own your greatness.”

“Protect your reputation.”

“Never let them see weakness.”

But Scripture says something different.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

— James 4:10

That is not self-esteem advice.

That is a command.

The Setting

The letter of James is written to believers scattered under pressure.

Chapter 4 addresses quarrels, worldliness, envy, and pride.

James writes bluntly:

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

Opposes.

The Greek word carries the idea of setting oneself against in battle.

God actively resists pride.

This is not mild disapproval.

It is divine opposition.

The Old Testament Foundation

This truth is not new.

Proverbs 6 lists things the Lord hates.

At the top:

“Haughty eyes.”

The pride of self-exaltation.

The assumption of superiority.

The refusal to bow.

Throughout Scripture, pride precedes collapse:

Pharaoh hardened his heart.

Nebuchadnezzar gloried in Babylon.

Uzziah assumed priestly privilege.

Each fell.

“Pride goes before destruction...” (Proverbs 16:18)

This is not poetry.

It is pattern.

Pride in the Garden

The first sin was not theft.

It was pride.

“You will be like God.”

Autonomy.

Self-rule.

Self-definition.

Humility was forfeited before fruit was eaten.

The entire biblical story unfolds from that moment.

Pride separates.

Humility restores.

Jesus: The Model

The ultimate picture of humility is Christ.

In Philippians 2, Paul writes:

“Though He was in the form of God... He emptied Himself...”

He took the form of a servant.

He humbled Himself.

He became obedient to the point of death.

Even death on a cross.

The eternal Son lowered Himself voluntarily.

Not because He lacked worth.

But because He possessed it.

True humility is not self-hatred.

It is accurate vision.

Christ knew who He was —
and still knelt to wash feet (John 13).

What Humility Is

It is not weakness.

It is not timidity.

It is not false modesty.

It is right alignment under God.

It is seeing oneself clearly:

Created.

Dependent.

Redeemed.

Not self-sustaining.

Humility acknowledges that everything is received.

“What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Why It Is Commanded

Because pride blocks grace.

James says:

God gives grace to the humble.

Which means pride chokes grace.

A proud heart does not repent easily.

It does not receive correction.

It does not confess quickly.

It defends.

Justifies.

Explains.

Blames.

Humility opens the door to restoration.

Pride bolts it shut.

Chapter 6

Living It Out — Humble Yourself

Humility sounds noble.

Until it costs you something.

Repent Quickly

The proud delay confession.

They soften language:

“I misspoke.”

“I was misunderstood.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

The humble say:

“I was wrong.”

Without qualifiers.

Without shifting blame.

Repentance is humility in action.

Receive Correction

When confronted:

Do you defend immediately?

Or do you listen?

Proverbs says:

“The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.”
(Proverbs 15:31)

Correction is not humiliation.

It is mercy.

Pride hears attack.

Humility hears opportunity.

Serve Without Recognition

In Gospel of John 13, Jesus washed feet.

The lowest task.

No applause.

No spotlight.

Humility does what needs doing, even when unseen.

If service requires recognition, it is not service — it is performance.

Let Others Be Praised

When someone else succeeds:

Does your heart rejoice?

Or tighten?

Pride competes.

Humility celebrates.

Pride wants to be noticed.

Humility wants Christ noticed.

The Many Faces of Pride

Pride is not always obvious.

Sometimes it is loud.

The one who dominates conversation.
The one who constantly recounts their schedule, sacrifices, connections.
The one who tells stories in a way that ensures admiration.

Humor can become a tool for attention.
Busyness can become a badge of importance.
Even ministry can become résumé-building.

Jesus warned in Gospel of Matthew 6 not to practice righteousness “to be seen by others.”

If being seen is the goal, the reward ends there.

But pride can also disguise itself as false humility.

“I am nothing.”
“I am useless.”
“God could never use me.”

That may sound humble.

But Scripture says in Ephesians 2:10 that we are His workmanship.

Psalm 139 declares we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

To deny all worth is not humility.

It subtly accuses God of overvaluing what He created and redeemed.

True humility is not self-erasure.

It is self-placement.

Not above others.
Not beneath design.
Under God.

Pride inflates self.
False humility diminishes self.
Humility aligns self.

Submit to Authority

James 4 links humility with submission to God.

Submission is not weakness.

It is trust.

We live under authority:

Scripture.

Church leadership.

God-ordained order.

Pride resists structure.

Humility yields where obedience to God allows.

The Hidden Places

Humility is most visible in private reactions:

When overlooked.

When corrected.

When misunderstood.

When someone else receives credit.

If resentment rises quickly, pride is present.

Humility rests in being known by God.

Why This Matters

James writes in James 4:6:

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

That should sober us.

To walk in pride is to invite resistance from Heaven.

But to humble yourself —

Is to position yourself for grace.

Grace for growth.

Grace for endurance.

Grace for usefulness.

The Hard Truth

We often want exaltation without lowering ourselves.

But the pattern is fixed:

Humble first.

Exaltation later.

Christ descended before He was lifted (Philippians 2).

Almost humble is not humble.

Polite pride is still pride.

And the One who hates haughty eyes sees beyond performance —
into motive.

TRUTH FOUR – DENY YOURSELF DAILY

Chapter 7

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Accept yourself.”

“Follow your heart.”

“God wants you fulfilled.”

“Christianity improves your life.”

But Jesus said something else.

“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

— Luke 9:23

This is not advice.

It is a requirement.

The Setting

In the Gospel of Luke 9, Jesus has just revealed that He must suffer, be rejected, killed, and raised.

The disciples are still expecting glory.

Victory.

Position.

But Jesus speaks of death.

Then He turns to the crowd and says:

“If anyone would come after Me...”

The invitation is open.

The condition is severe.

What “Deny Yourself” Means

It does not mean self-hatred.

It does not mean denying your personality.

It means denying self-rule.

Rejecting self as master.

In the garden, humanity chose autonomy:

“I will decide.”

Jesus calls us back to surrender:

“Not my will.”

To deny yourself is to say:

My desires are not final authority.

My feelings are not ultimate guide.

My ambitions are not supreme.

Take Up Your Cross

First-century listeners understood this immediately.

The cross was not jewelry.

It was execution.

Public humiliation.

Total surrender.

To take up a cross meant you were walking toward death.
Jesus is not speaking metaphorically about inconvenience.
He is speaking about death to self.
Daily.

Daily

This is not a conversion moment only.
It is ongoing.
Every morning.
Every decision.
Every reaction.
The old self does not surrender quietly.

Paul writes in Galatians 5:24:

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Crucifixion is not partial.

It is final.

Why It Is Required

Because following Christ without surrender is impossible.

You cannot serve two masters.

You cannot enthrone self and call it discipleship.

Salvation is by grace alone.

But allegiance is visible.

The call to deny self separates admiration from obedience.

Chapter 8

Living It Out — Deny Yourself Daily

The command is clear.

The question is what death to self looks like in ordinary life.

When You Are Offended

Self demands defense.

Self rehearses arguments.

Self seeks vindication.

Denying yourself may mean absorbing a minor insult.

Choosing silence.

Refusing to escalate.

Not every offense requires response.

When You Want Recognition

Self wants credit.

Self wants appreciation.

Denying yourself may mean serving anonymously.

Letting someone else receive praise.

Working faithfully without announcement.

When Desire Conflicts with Obedience

The flesh says:

“I want.”

Scripture says:

“Flee.”

Whether sexual temptation, greed, envy, anger — denial means saying no.

Even when no one sees.

Even when it costs comfort.

Even when it feels unfair.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Gospel of Matthew 4).

He did not sin.

Temptation is not failure.

Indulgence is.

When Convenience Collides with Sacrifice

You are tired.

You are busy.

You have plans.

And someone needs help.

Denying yourself may mean:

Interrupting your evening.

Giving when it strains your budget.

Listening when you would rather scroll.

Self-protection is natural.

Self-denial is supernatural.

In Marriage

Denying yourself may mean:

Yielding preference.

Apologizing first.

Serving when you feel unappreciated.

Love thrives where self dies.

In Ambition

Self says:

Climb.

Secure.

Advance.

Denying yourself may mean:

Turning down opportunity that harms your spiritual life.

Refusing unethical advantage.

Choosing integrity over promotion.

The Inner Battle

Paul describes the struggle in Romans 7.

There is conflict within.

Not all sin is demonic.

Much is flesh.

The solution is not willpower alone.

It is walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5).

Self-denial is empowered surrender.

Not grim determination.

The Hard Truth

Many want the benefits of Christ without the death of self.

But resurrection follows crucifixion.

Not the other way around.

If self remains enthroned, Christ is merely advisor.

He did not call disciples to improve themselves.

He called them to die.

Almost surrendered is not surrendered.

And daily means today.

TRUTH FIVE — FORGIVE AS YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

Chapter 9

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“I’ll forgive, but I won’t forget.”

“They don’t deserve forgiveness.”

“I’ll forgive when they apologize.”

“Some things are unforgivable.”

But Jesus speaks differently.

“If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

— Matthew 6:15

Those words are not soft.

They are sobering.

The Setting

This statement appears in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew 6.

It follows the Lord’s Prayer:

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Jesus then pauses — and elaborates only on that line.

Not on daily bread.

Not on deliverance.

On forgiveness.

Why?

Because forgiveness reveals whether grace has truly been received.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Later, in Gospel of Matthew 18, Peter asks:

“How often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Jesus replies:

“Seventy-seven times.”

Then He tells a parable.

A servant owes a king an unpayable debt.

Millions.

He begs for mercy.

The king forgives the entire amount.

That servant then finds someone who owes him a small sum.

He demands payment.

He chokes him.

He refuses mercy.

The king hears of it and says:

“Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”

The issue is not mathematics.

It is comparison.

Your sin against God is immeasurable.

The sins against you — while real — are finite.

What Forgiveness Is

It is not pretending harm did not occur.

It is not minimizing injustice.

It is not immediate trust restoration.

It is releasing the right to personal vengeance.

It is surrendering judgment to God.

Paul writes in Romans 12:

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.”

Forgiveness entrusts justice to a righteous Judge.

What Forgiveness Is Not

It is not enabling abuse.

It is not erasing consequences.

It is not forced reconciliation where repentance is absent.

It is an internal surrender.

A refusal to keep score.

A refusal to rehearse bitterness.

Why It Is Commanded

Because unforgiveness contradicts the Gospel.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:32:

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

The standard is not how they treated you.

The standard is how Christ treated you.

And at the cross, forgiveness was granted before repentance was perfected.

Jesus prayed:

“Father, forgive them...” (Luke 23:34)

While nails were still in place.

Chapter 10

Living It Out — Forgive as You Have Been Forgiven

Forgiveness is not theoretical.

It confronts memory.

Pain.

Betrayal.

Loss.

When the Wound Is Small

A careless comment.

A forgotten invitation.

A misunderstanding.

Self wants to rehearse it.

Replay it.

Let it harden.

Forgiveness chooses not to magnify the minor.

Love “covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

When the Wound Is Deep

Infidelity.

Abandonment.

Slander.

Financial betrayal.

Abuse.

These are not light matters.

Forgiveness here is not emotional.

It is deliberate.

It may be repeated daily.

“I release this to You, Lord.”

Not because it didn't hurt.

But because Christ absorbed your greater debt.

The Internal Test

Do you rehearse their offense?

Do you retell the story often?

Do you subtly diminish their reputation?

Do you secretly hope they fail?

These are signs forgiveness has not yet taken root.

Bitterness often disguises itself as justice.

But Hebrews warns that a root of bitterness defiles many.

Unforgiveness rarely stays contained.

It spreads.

Forgiveness and Boundaries

Forgiving does not mean trusting automatically.

Trust is rebuilt through repentance and fruit.

Forgiveness releases hatred.

Wisdom may still require distance.

Jesus forgave freely.

He did not entrust Himself to everyone (John 2:24).

The Cost

Forgiveness feels unfair.

Because it is.

Grace always is.

At the cross, justice fell on Christ.

If you demand full repayment from others, you are forgetting the payment made for you.

The Hard Truth

You will never forgive someone more than you have been forgiven.

If forgiveness feels impossible, return to the cross.

Measure your debt.

Measure His mercy.

Then forgive accordingly.

Almost forgiving is not forgiving.

Delayed forgiveness is often disguised pride.

And one day, we will stand before the One who forgave us first.

TRUTH SIX – GUARD YOUR WORDS

Chapter 11

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Words don’t hurt.”

“I was just joking.”

“I speak my truth.”

“It’s just venting.”

But Jesus says something that should arrest us:

“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.”

— Matthew 12:36

Every.

Careless.

Word.

That is more than uncomfortable.

It is sobering.

The Setting

In the Gospel of Matthew 12, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by Satan’s power.

They are not misinformed.

They are malicious.

Jesus responds by warning them about blasphemy and hardened hearts.

Then He says:

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34)

Words are not random.

They reveal.

Then comes the warning:

“For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:37)

Speech is evidence.

Not of perfection.

But of allegiance.

Every Careless Word

The phrase “careless word” can mean idle, useless, unproductive.

Unconsidered.

Empty.

Jesus is not only addressing slander.

He is addressing casual speech.

Flippant speech.

Speech disconnected from truth and love.

This includes:

Gossip.

Sarcasm that wounds.

Exaggeration.

Half-truths.

Slander masked as prayer requests.

Careless humor that diminishes others.

The warning is not symbolic.

There will be accounting.

The Tongue in James

The book of James 3 expands the warning.

“The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.”

A spark sets a forest ablaze.

A rudder steers a ship.

A bit directs a horse.

The tongue directs lives.

James says:

“No human being can tame the tongue.”

It is a restless evil.

Full of deadly poison.

With it we bless God.

With it we curse people made in His likeness.

“This ought not to be so.”

Why Words Matter So Much

Because God created with words.

Because Christ is called the Word.

Because truth is spoken.

Because lies destroy.

Speech is not minor.

It shapes reality.

Families fracture over words.

Churches split over words.

Reputations crumble over words.

Children remember words decades later.

You may forget what you said.

They will not.

The Weight of Accountability

“For every careless word...”

That does not mean salvation is lost over slip-ups.

We are justified by grace through faith (Ephesians 2).

But grace does not remove evaluation.

We will stand before Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Our words will testify.

That is daunting.

It should be.

Chapter 12

Living It Out — Guard Your Words

If every word carries weight, then discipline must follow.

Before You Speak

Ask:

Is it true?

Is it necessary?

Is it kind?

Is it the right time?

Not all true things need to be said.

Not all corrections need to be public.

Not all jokes need to be shared.

Self-control is Spirit-produced (Galatians 5:23).

Gossip Disguised

Gossip often wears spiritual clothing.

“Pray for them...”

“Did you hear what happened?”

“Just between us...”

If the person being discussed were present, would you speak the same way?

If not, silence is wiser.

Humor That Wounds

Sarcasm can bond a room.

It can also humiliate someone quietly.

We excuse it as personality.

But repeated cutting humor can harden hearts.

Words linger.

Especially in children.

Especially in marriage.

Especially in leadership.

Digital Speech

In our age, words travel instantly.

Comments.

Posts.

Messages.

We type what we might never say face-to-face.

But heaven records both.

Anonymity does not erase accountability.

When Angry

Anger loosens restraint.

James also says:

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19)

Delay speech.

Silence can prevent regret.

Many sentences cannot be unsaid.

Speaking Life

Guarding words is not merely avoiding harm.

It is choosing life.

Encouragement.

Truth spoken in love.

Correction delivered gently.

Blessing instead of cursing.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:29:

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up...”

Speech should build.

Not erode.

The Internal Source

You cannot fix speech without addressing the heart.

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

If criticism dominates speech, pride may dominate the heart.

If negativity dominates speech, ingratitude may dominate the heart.

Transformation begins within.

The Hard Truth

We speak thousands of words each day.

Most feel insignificant.

But heaven does not treat them that way.

Every careless word.

That should not paralyze us.

It should sober us.

Almost careful is not careful.

And the mouth reveals whether Christ rules the heart.

TRUTH SEVEN — MAKE DISCIPLES

Chapter 13

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Share your faith if it comes up.”

“Live a good life — that’s enough.”

“Evangelism is for pastors.”

“Missionaries are specially called.”

But the risen Christ said something unmistakable:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

— Matthew 28:19

This was not a suggestion.

It was the final command.

The Setting

These words appear at the end of the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus has risen.

He has conquered death.

He gathers His disciples on a mountain in Galilee.

He declares:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”

Then — on the basis of that authority — He commands.

The structure matters.

Authority first.

Obedience next.

The One who commands is King.

What the Command Actually Says

The central verb is “make disciples.”

Not:

Make converts.

Not:

Win arguments.

Not:

Collect decisions.

Make disciples.

A disciple is a learner.

A follower.

One who rearranges life around the Master.

This involves:

Going.

Baptizing.

Teaching obedience.

Notice — not just teaching information.

Teaching obedience.

This Command Was Given To

Ordinary men.

Fishermen.

Former tax collectors.

Doubters.

Matthew notes that some worshiped — and some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

And Jesus still sent them.

The mission is not reserved for the elite.

If you are redeemed, you are sent.

The Pattern in Acts

The book of Acts of the Apostles shows this unfolding.

Believers scattered — and spoke.

Homes opened.

Scripture explained.

Lives transformed.

The Church grew not because professionals were active —

But because ordinary believers obeyed.

Why This Is Non-Negotiable

Because eternity is real.

Because the Gospel is exclusive.

Because silence leaves people lost.

Paul writes in Romans 10:

“How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard?”

If no one speaks, no one hears.

If no one teaches, no one grows.

The mission of the Church is not self-preservation.

It is multiplication.

The Weight of Omission

We often measure sin by what we do wrong.

But Scripture also warns about what we fail to do.

James says:

“Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”
(James 4:17)

If making disciples is commanded —

Then neglecting it is not neutrality.

It is disobedience.

Chapter 14

Living It Out — Make Disciples

The question is not whether you are called.

The question is how you are obeying.

It Begins at Home

If you are a parent, your first disciples are your children.

Not the church.

Not youth programs.

You.

Read Scripture with them.

Pray with them.

Teach them obedience, not mere morality.

You cannot outsource discipleship.

It Continues in Proximity

Who in your life is spiritually younger?

A new believer.

A struggling believer.

A curious neighbor.

Discipleship often begins with:

Regular meetings.

Open Bibles.

Honest conversations.

Shared meals.

Faith modeled in real life.

It Requires Intention

You will not make disciples accidentally.

You must choose it.

Schedule it.

Prioritize it.

If your calendar has no margin for spiritual investment, something else is first.

It Is Not Complicated

Discipleship is not a curriculum first.

It is life shared.

Teaching someone:

How to pray.

How to read Scripture.

How to fight temptation.

How to repent.

How to serve.

Paul told Timothy:

“What you have heard from me... entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

— 2 Timothy 2:2

Four generations in one verse.

This is multiplication.

It Involves Speaking the Gospel Clearly

Lifestyle alone is insufficient.

The Gospel must be articulated.

Christ died for sin.

He rose.

Repent and believe.

Clarity matters.

People cannot believe what they do not understand.

Overcoming Fear

Fear of rejection silences many.

Fear of awkwardness.

Fear of not knowing enough.

But Jesus promised:

“I am with you always.” (Matthew 28:20)

Presence accompanies obedience.

You do not disciple in your own strength.

The Hard Truth

Many believers attend church faithfully.

Serve occasionally.

Give financially.

But have never personally discipled another person.

Years pass.

Decades pass.

No multiplication.

That is not maturity.

That is stagnation.

Almost involved is not obedient.

The Kingdom advances through people who invest in people.

And one day, when we give account —

We will not be asked how comfortable we were.

But whether we obeyed.

TRUTH EIGHT — FEAR GOD, NOT MAN

Chapter 15

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Don’t be extreme.”

“Keep your faith private.”

“Don’t offend.”

“Just go along to get along.”

But Jesus said:

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

— Matthew 10:28

Those are not gentle words.

They are clarifying words.

The Setting

In the Gospel of Matthew 10, Jesus is sending out the Twelve.

He does not promise ease.

He promises opposition.

Arrest.

Hatred.

Division even within families.

And in that context, He says:

Do not fear them.

Fear God.

This is not about personality courage.

It is about allegiance.

What “Fear” Means

Biblical fear is not panic.

It is reverent awe mixed with accountability.

It is awareness that God is ultimate.

That His judgment is final.

That His authority outranks all earthly authority.

Proverbs says:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Fear of man begins compromise.

Fear of God begins clarity.

The Pattern in Scripture

When fear of man ruled, obedience collapsed.

Aaron feared the crowd — and built a golden calf.

Saul feared public opinion — and spared what God said destroy.

Peter feared a servant girl — and denied Christ.

Each moment was small.

Each compromise significant.

Fear of man rarely announces itself loudly.

It whispers:

This isn't worth the tension.

Stay quiet.

Protect your image.

Why This Is So Hard

Because we crave acceptance.

Rejection stings.

Social isolation wounds.

Reputation matters to us.

But Jesus warns in Gospel of Luke 9:26:

“Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed.”

Ashamed is not hatred.

It is reluctance.

Silence.

Distancing.

Fear of man reshapes faith into something culturally manageable.

The Ultimate Accountability

There will be a final reckoning.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Crowds will not be present.

Opinion polls will not matter.

God’s evaluation will.

The fear of man shrinks in light of that day.

Chapter 16

Living It Out — Fear God, Not Man

The command is clear.

The conflict is daily.

When Truth Is Unpopular

Scripture speaks clearly on sin.

On holiness.

On salvation through Christ alone.

In many settings, those truths are labeled intolerant.

Fear of man softens language.

Fear of God speaks truth in love — but speaks.

Silence to preserve comfort is not neutrality.

It is compromise.

In the Workplace

You may face pressure to affirm what Scripture does not affirm.

To remain silent about what Scripture calls sin.

To participate in practices that dull conscience.

Fear of man says:

Protect your career.

Fear of God says:

Protect your soul.

In Family Tension

Sometimes obedience strains relationships.

Choosing church over convenience.

Refusing sinful participation at gatherings.

Setting boundaries with grace.

Fear of man avoids discomfort.

Fear of God endures it.

When Reputation Is at Stake

Public disagreement.

Standing for biblical truth.

Refusing unethical gain.

Fear of man calculates consequences.

Fear of God calculates eternity.

The Subtle Forms

Fear of man is not always dramatic persecution.

It can be:

Avoiding spiritual conversations.

Downplaying your convictions.

Laughing at what you should reject.

Remaining silent when God's name is mocked.

These moments feel small.

But they reveal allegiance.

Courage Is Not Personality

Some are bold by nature.

Others quiet.

This command is not about temperament.

It is about priority.

The timid disciple who obeys despite fear honors God more than the loud unbeliever who fears nothing.

Courage is obedience in the presence of fear.

The Promise

Jesus does not only warn.

He comforts.

In Gospel of Matthew 10, just after commanding fear of God, He reminds them:

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father... You are of more value than many sparrows.”

Fear God — yes.

But remember His care.

He is not tyrant.

He is Judge and Father.

The Hard Truth

We often fear losing reputation more than losing reward.

We often fear awkwardness more than accountability.

But one day, human opinion will dissolve.

Only Christ's assessment will remain.

Almost bold is still compromised.

Almost faithful is still hesitant.

And the fear that governs your life reveals the king you serve.

TRUTH NINE – STORE UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Chapter 17

The Command in Context

You Have Heard It Said...

“Build wealth.”

“Secure your future.”

“You earned it.”

“This is mine.”

But Jesus said:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

— Matthew 6:19–20

Not:

Avoid possessions.

Not:

Despise provision.

But:

Do not store your treasure here.

The Setting

These words appear in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew 6.

Jesus has already addressed prayer, fasting, generosity.

Now He addresses wealth and security.

In first-century Israel, wealth was unstable.

Moths destroyed fabric wealth.

Rust corrupted metal.

Thieves broke through mud walls.

Earthly treasure was vulnerable.

Jesus is not making a poetic point.

He is stating economic reality.

Everything here decays.

Where Your Treasure Is

Jesus continues:

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

Treasure directs affection.

Investment directs loyalty.

What you protect most fiercely reveals what you worship most deeply.

This is not about coins.

It is about heart orientation.

You Own Nothing

This truth runs throughout Scripture.

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24:1)

David prayed in 1 Chronicles 29:

“For all things come from You, and of Your own have we given You.”

Even generosity returns what was first given.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul asks:

“What do you have that you did not receive?”

The answer is nothing.

If everything is received, nothing is ultimately owned.

We are stewards.

Temporary managers.

Not proprietors.

Why This Is Hard

Because possession feels permanent.

We buy.

We build.

We insure.

We defend.

We say:

“My house.”

“My retirement.”

“My investments.”

“My career.”

But every one of those will pass to another.

You will not take a single asset into eternity.

The illusion of ownership fuels anxiety and pride.

Stewardship produces humility and freedom.

The Eternal Contrast

Earthly treasure decays.

Heavenly treasure does not.

Heavenly treasure includes:

Faithfulness.

Generosity.

Souls disciplined.

Sacrificial obedience.

Hidden acts of service.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:

“As for the rich... they are to do good, to be rich in good works... thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future.”

Not wealth condemned.

Misplaced hope condemned.

Chapter 18

Living It Out — Store Up Treasure in Heaven

This is where conviction becomes visible.

Releasing Ownership

Change the language internally:

Not “mine.”

Entrusted.

Not “earned.”

Given opportunity.

Not “secured.”

Temporarily held.

This shift alone alters how you spend.

How you give.

How tightly you cling.

Generosity That Costs

If giving never alters your lifestyle, it may not yet be treasure-shifting.

The widow in Gospel of Mark 12 gave two small coins.

Jesus said she gave more than the wealthy.

Because she gave from lack.

Heaven measures differently.

Investing in Souls

One of the most profound treasures is people.

Disciples made.

Children trained.

Mission supported.

Church strengthened.

No earthly portfolio matches eternal fruit.

When someone stands in eternity because you gave, prayed, spoke, disciplined

—

That is treasure stored.

Resisting Lifestyle Escalation

As income rises, so do expectations.

Bigger homes.

Better comforts.

More insulation.

Storing treasure in heaven may mean:

Capping lifestyle increases.

Increasing generosity as blessing increases.

Choosing simplicity where culture expects indulgence.

Security and Anxiety

Much accumulation is driven by fear.

“What if?”

Jesus already addressed worry in Matthew 6.

Storing treasure in heaven is an act of trust.

Provision is God’s responsibility.

Faithfulness is yours.

The Hard Truth

Most believers say heaven is their home.

But their investments suggest permanence here.

We insure earthly assets meticulously.

Do we invest eternally deliberately?

Almost generous is not generous.

Almost surrendered is not surrendered.

You will leave everything here.

The only treasure you keep is what you send ahead.

TRUTH TEN — BE READY — YOU WILL GIVE ACCOUNT

Chapter 19

The Certainty of Accountability — And the Reality of Entrustment Have Heard It Said...

“Salvation settles everything.”

“Once I’m saved, the rest is optional.”

“Heaven is rest — nothing more.”

But Jesus consistently taught something deeper.

“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”
— Hebrews 9:27

There is an appointment.

And there is an accounting.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”

This is not condemnation for believers.

Romans 8:1 assures us of that.

But it is evaluation.

Assessment.

Review.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul describes works tested by fire.

Gold remains.
Straw burns.

The person may be saved —
but loss is real.

The language is not symbolic comfort.

It is sober warning.

The Parable of the Talents — The Setup for Judgment

In Gospel of Matthew 25, Jesus tells of a master who entrusts servants with great wealth before leaving on a journey.

He gives “to each according to his ability.”

Then he departs.

The delay is intentional.

It mirrors our age.

The Master has ascended.

We live in the interval.

Each servant receives differently.

Five.

Two.

One.

Unequal distribution — but equal responsibility.

The issue is not comparison.

The issue is faithfulness.

When the master returns, he “settles accounts.”

That phrase matters.

He does not ask:

Were you impressive?

He asks:

What did you do with what I gave you?

The Sin of Preservation

The third servant did not squander the money.

He buried it.

He preserved it.

He waited.

He returned exactly what was given.

And he was condemned.

Not for rebellion.

But for inactivity.

For fear.

For refusing to invest what was entrusted.

This confronts comfortable Christianity directly.

Safe spirituality is not praised.

Faithful risk is.

The Root Problem

The third servant reveals his heart:

“I knew you to be a hard man...”

His view of the master shaped his behavior.

Distorted theology produced passive obedience.

If we see God as harsh, we hide.

If we see Him as holy and generous, we invest boldly.

Accountability exposes belief.

The Pattern Across Jesus’ Teaching

In the same chapter:

The wise and foolish virgins — readiness tested.

The sheep and goats — compassion evaluated.

The theme is consistent:

You were entrusted.

You were expected to act.

You will answer.

The Crowns — A Glimpse of Reward

Scripture speaks of reward:

The crown of life (James 1:12).

The crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8).

The crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4).

We do not fully grasp what these mean.

But they are real.

In Revelation 4, elders cast crowns before the throne.

They are not ego trophies.

They are offerings of faithfulness.

Heaven is not static inactivity.

It includes reigning with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12).

Responsibility.

Participation.

Joy in the Master.

What we do now may shape our capacity then.

Scripture hints at something far more remarkable than we imagine.

The Hard Reality

You have been entrusted.

Time.

Truth.

Opportunity.

Resources.

Influence.

Spiritual gifts.

To ignore them is not neutrality.

It is burial.

And burial invites loss.

Chapter 20

Living Ready — Invest, Do Not Bury

If accountability is certain, then the only faithful response is investment.

Not anxiety.

Not paralysis.

Investment.

You Were Not Saved to Wait

Salvation rescues.

But it also commissions.

Ephesians 2:10 makes this clear:

Saved by grace —
created for good works.

Waiting passively is not faithfulness.

It is delay disguised as devotion.

The Myth of “Safe Christianity”

Many believers live carefully:

Avoiding scandal.

Attending church.

Maintaining moral appearance.

But never risking for the Kingdom.

Never disciplining intentionally.

Never sacrificing significantly.

Never speaking boldly.

That is preservation.

Not multiplication.

The faithful servants traded.

They risked.

They acted.

Profuse Use of What You Have

Not cautious minimalism.

Profuse faithfulness.

If you teach — teach deeply.

If you give — give generously.

If you lead — lead courageously.

If you speak — speak clearly.

If you pray — pray fervently.

Bury nothing.

Investment in People

The greatest treasure entrusted to you may not be money.

It may be influence.

A child watching you.

A coworker listening.

A younger believer learning.

Investment in souls echoes into eternity.

When someone stands in glory because you spoke, prayed, disciplined —

That is treasure beyond calculation.

Fear Is the Enemy of Faithfulness

The third servant buried because he feared loss.

Fear of failure.

Fear of risk.

Fear of miscalculation.

But fear of man, fear of loss, fear of discomfort —

All lead to buried obedience.

Faith acts.

Even uncertain.

What Crowns May Mean

We cannot define fully.

But Scripture suggests:

Greater responsibility.

Greater participation in Christ's reign.

Greater capacity for joy.

Faithfulness now may expand eternal capacity.

Not earning heaven.

But enlarging usefulness in it.

If so, the stakes are far higher than comfort.

The Final Examination Question

When Christ returns, will He find:

Preservation?

Or multiplication?

Did you seek first?

Love tangibly?

Humble yourself?

Deny self daily?

Forgive deeply?

Guard your words?

Make disciples?

Fear God over man?

Store treasure in heaven?

These were not abstract teachings.

They were investments.

The Last Hard Truth

You will stand before Christ.

Grace will cover your sin.

But your life will still testify.

You cannot relive this stewardship.

You cannot recover buried years.

You cannot re-invest neglected opportunity.

Today is the trading floor.

Tomorrow is not promised.

Do not bury what He gave you.

Invest it.

And enter the joy of your Master.