



PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

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"From Workmanship to Witness: How God Transforms Broken Vessels into Bearers of His Light"

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"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

— Jude 24-25 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

FOREWORD

The Journey from Workmanship to Glory

I still remember the moment I realized I was a fraud.

It was late on a Tuesday night, sitting alone in my study after a particularly brutal counseling session. I'd spent two hours listening to someone pour out their pain—the kind of deep soul-wounds that come from religious abuse, spiritual manipulation, and the crushing weight of never being "enough" for God. After they left, I sat there staring at my bookshelves lined with theology texts and ministry resources, and a terrible question surfaced: *Am I really any different?*

I'd spent years trying to convince myself and everyone around me that I had it all together, that my faith had somehow insulated me from doubt, that pastors were immune to the darkness that invades your soul when you see too much brokenness in others while ignoring your own. I was maintaining an image while crumbling inside, performing Christianity while forgetting what it meant to simply be loved by God.

That night, I opened my Bible desperately searching for something, anything, that would anchor my soul. I landed on Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Workmanship. The word hit me like a freight train.

Not a finished product. Not a polished saint. Not someone who has it all together. *Workmanship*—something still being worked on, shaped, formed. Something in process.

That night, in that study, I realized something profound: God wasn't waiting for me to get my act together before He could use me. He was using the very process of my breaking and remaking to prepare me for something I couldn't yet see.

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This is a book about that journey—the journey from being God's workmanship to becoming a bearer of His glory. But let me be crystal clear from the start: this isn't a book about self-improvement, spiritual disciplines that will finally make you "good enough," or ten steps to becoming the Christian you've always wanted to be. We've had enough of those books. They've done enough damage.

This is a book about grace. Scandalous, undeserved, transformative grace.

Why This Book Matters Now

We live in an age of spiritual exhaustion. I meet people every day who are tired—tired of performing, tired of pretending, tired of measuring up to standards they can never quite reach. The church-wounded. The burned out. The disillusioned. The ones who've been told they're not enough, not spiritual enough, not committed enough, not healed enough, not faithful enough.

People carrying trauma they've never been allowed to acknowledge. Ministry leaders who've given everything and feel utterly empty. Regular folks trying to live out an impossible Christianity that looks nothing like the Jesus they first fell in love with. Those whose faith has been weaponized against them, who've been taught that doubt is sin and struggle is weakness.

If that's you—if you're exhausted, broken, questioning, barely hanging on—then this book is for you. Because here's the scandalous truth of the gospel: God specializes in broken people. He doesn't wait for us to fix ourselves. He doesn't require us to clean up our act before we can approach Him. He meets us in our mess and does something we could never do for ourselves.

He transforms us from glory to glory.

The Framework: Three Movements of Grace

This book follows three interconnected movements that capture the biblical arc of transformation:

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First, God HAS PREPARED. Before you were born, before you took your first breath, before you made your first mistake, God was already at work. He created you as His workmanship with specific good works in mind. He prepared a path for you to walk, a purpose for you to fulfill, a glory for you to reveal. Your past doesn't disqualify you. Your failures don't surprise Him. Your brokenness doesn't derail His plan. In fact, He's been preparing you through it all.

Second, God IS PREPARING. Right now, in this very moment, you are in process. The gospel that saved you is the same gospel that sanctifies you. God is revealing His righteousness "from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17)—progressively, continuously, transforming you "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Every trial, every struggle, every moment of feeling inadequate is part of His refining work. You're not a finished product, and that's exactly how it should be.

Third, God HAS PREPARED FOR YOU. There's a future so glorious, so beyond our comprehension, that Paul says, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). We're not just being saved FROM something; we're being saved FOR something. We're not just avoiding hell; we're being prepared for an eternal weight of glory that makes every earthly suffering pale in comparison.

What This Book Is—And Isn't

This book is NOT:

- A formula for instant spiritual maturity
- A guilt trip about where you should be by now
- A manual for self-improvement disguised as theology
- Another burden to carry or standard to meet
- A defense of toxic religion or spiritual abuse

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This book IS:

- An honest look at how God transforms broken people
- A biblical exploration of sanctification as a grace-driven process
- An invitation to embrace your identity as God's workmanship
- A vision for what God is preparing you for—and preparing in you
- A safe place to acknowledge your struggles and doubts

I've written this from the trenches, not the ivory tower. I'm a pastor who's walked with people through spiritual crisis and religious trauma. I'm a chaplain who's sat with the dying and the desperate, the addicted and the abandoned. I'm a recovering performance addict who's learned—slowly and painfully—what it means to rest in grace rather than strive for acceptance. I'm someone who's been deeply wounded by the very institution I now serve, and who's had to learn what it means to separate Jesus from the dysfunction of His followers.

But most importantly, I'm a ragamuffin. A broken vessel. An earthen pot carrying treasure I don't deserve and can't contain. And if God can use someone like me to reveal His glory, then friend, He can use anyone.

How to Use This Book

You'll notice this book is divided into five parts, moving from foundation to consummation:

Part One establishes the theological foundation—who God is, what He's done, and what He's promised.

Part Two explores the transformation process—how God actually changes us from glory to glory.

Part Three examines how glory manifests in daily life—what it looks like to be a light bearer.

Part Four gets intensely practical—the disciplines and practices that position us for transformation.

Part Five looks ahead to ultimate glorification—the hope that sustains us now.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Each chapter includes Scripture (NASB), theological insights from trusted voices, and practical applications. But here's my invitation: don't rush through this. Don't treat it like another book to check off your list. Let it marinate. Sit with the passages. Argue with the ideas. Bring your questions, your doubts, your frustrations.

The study questions in Appendix C are designed for both personal reflection and group discussion. I'd actually encourage you to read this with others—a small group, a couple of trusted friends, a mentor. We don't transform in isolation. Iron sharpens iron, and we need each other for this journey.

A Word to the Wounded

If you've been hurt by the church, if you've been told your trauma makes you less spiritual, if you've been shamed for your struggles or your questions—I want you to know something: your wounds don't disqualify you from God's glory. They're often the very place where His light shines brightest.

God isn't interested in your performance. He's not keeping score. He's not waiting for you to prove yourself worthy. You can't earn what He's already freely given. You can't impress Someone who already delights in you. You can't lose what was never based on your goodness to begin with.

The transformation we're talking about in this book isn't about becoming acceptable to God—you already are, in Christ. It's about becoming who you truly are, the person God created you to be before the world told you who you had to be to survive.

A Personal Invitation

I want to invite you into a different way of thinking about the Christian life—one that's less about striving and more about surrendering, less about performing and more about becoming, less about proving yourself and more about receiving what God freely offers.

God is not disappointed in you. He's not standing over you with a clipboard, marking down all the ways you've failed to measure up. He's a Father who delights in His children. He's a Potter who takes pleasure in the clay. He's a Master Craftsman who sees the finished product even while He's still shaping the material.

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You are His workmanship. Not His disappointment. Not His burden. Not His failure. His workmanship—created in Christ Jesus for good works that He prepared beforehand specifically for you.

And here's the mystery that will unfold through these pages: as you learn to rest in that identity, as you stop striving and start surrendering, as you embrace being a work in progress rather than pretending to be a finished product—that's when the glory starts to shine through.

Not your glory. His.

Brennan Manning, the patron saint of ragamuffins, once wrote: "The gospel is absurd and the life of Jesus is meaningless unless we believe that He lived, died, and rose again with but one purpose in mind: to make brand-new creation. Not to make people with better morals but to create a community of prophets and professional lovers, men and women who would surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Spirit that burns within, who would live in ever greater fidelity to the omnipresent Word of God, who would enter into the center of it all, the very heart and mystery of Christ, into the center of the flame that consumes, purifies, and sets everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love."

That's what this book is about. That flame. That transformation. That glory.

The journey isn't easy. Transformation never is. But you're not alone. God is with you, in you, working through you. He began a good work in you, and He'll see it through to completion.

Not because you're strong enough, but because He is. Not because you're faithful enough, but because He is. Not because you've earned it, but because grace is a gift.

Are you ready?

Let's begin.

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." — Philippians 1:6 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

INTRODUCTION

Created for Glory

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." — Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

There's a masterpiece hidden in every block of marble.

Michelangelo understood this. When he looked at a rough, uncut stone, he didn't see limitation—he saw possibility. He famously said, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free." The sculpture, in his mind, was already there. His job wasn't to create something from nothing, but to reveal what was already present, hidden beneath layers of excess stone.

This is how God sees you.

Not as you appear right now—broken, flawed, incomplete. Not as the world has labeled you—damaged goods, too far gone, beyond repair. Not even as you see yourself—a failure, a fraud, someone who's blown too many chances and made too many mistakes.

God sees the masterpiece. He sees His workmanship. He sees the glory He placed within you before the foundation of the world, and He's committed to the painstaking, often painful process of chipping away everything that obscures it.

You were created for glory. Not to earn it. Not to achieve it. Not to perform your way into it. You were *created for* it—designed with divine purpose, crafted with intentionality, shaped for a specific calling that only you can fulfill.

This is where our journey begins.

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The Divine Purpose Behind Creation and Redemption

Let's start with the most foundational truth in all of Scripture: you are not an accident.

In a universe of random chance, chaos, and entropy, you are an intentional act of divine creation. Before time began, before galaxies spun into existence, before the first light pierced the darkness, God had you in mind. You weren't an afterthought. You weren't Plan B. You were always part of the plan.

The Apostle Paul captures this staggering reality in Ephesians 1:4-5: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."

Read that again slowly. *Before the foundation of the world*. Before sin entered the picture. Before you made your first mistake. Before your first wound, your first failure, your first moment of shame—God chose you.

This isn't just about salvation from sin, though that's gloriously included. This is about original design. God didn't create you merely to rescue you from fallenness. He created you to bear His image, to reflect His glory, to be His representative in a broken world. Sin interrupted that design, but it didn't destroy it. And redemption isn't just about restoration—it's about completion.

As C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

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This is the scandal and the glory of the gospel: God doesn't just want to fix you up enough to make you presentable. He wants to completely transform you into something far more glorious than you ever imagined. He's not interested in behavior modification. He's after total transformation.

Understanding the Progression: A Three-Movement Symphony

The Christian life isn't static. It's not about arriving at a destination and then simply maintaining that position. It's dynamic, progressive, always moving forward. The biblical picture is one of constant transformation, continual growth, perpetual deepening.

Think of it as a three-movement symphony, each building on the last:

Movement One: PREPARED (Past)

"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

Long before you knew you needed saving, God was already preparing the way. This is the grand narrative of Scripture—a God who pursues, who prepares, who makes a way where there is no way.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Consider the layers of preparation:

- He prepared a world for you to inhabit (Genesis 1-2)
- He prepared a covenant for you to enter (Genesis 12, 15, 17)
- He prepared a law to reveal your need (Romans 7:7-12)
- He prepared prophets to announce His coming (Hebrews 1:1)
- He prepared a Savior to redeem you (Galatians 4:4-5)
- He prepared a cross for your sins (1 Peter 1:18-20)
- He prepared an empty tomb for your hope (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
- He prepared the gospel for your ears (Romans 10:14-15)
- He prepared faith in your heart (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- He prepared good works for your life (Ephesians 2:10)

Before you took your first breath, God had already been working for millennia to make your salvation possible. The entire sweep of redemptive history was God preparing the way for you to come home.

But it goes even deeper. Look at what Paul says in Romans 8:29-30: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

Notice the past tense of that final verb: *glorified*. Not "will glorify" but *glorified*. In God's economy, your glorification is so certain that it's spoken of as already accomplished. From His eternal perspective, it's already done. The masterpiece is already complete.

This is the foundation: God has prepared everything necessary for your transformation. The question is never whether God is able or willing. The question is whether we'll trust the process.

Movement Two: BEING PREPARED (Present)

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

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This is where most of us live—in the tension of the already-but-not-yet. We're saved but still being sanctified. We're justified but not yet glorified. We possess the Holy Spirit but still struggle with the flesh. We're children of God who don't always act like it.

And this is precisely where the glory happens.

Paul describes this process in Romans 1:17: "For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." From faith to faith. Not from faith to sight. Not from faith to arrival. From one level of faith to a deeper level of faith. It's progressive, cumulative, transformative.

The gospel that saved you is the same gospel that sanctifies you. It's not as if God uses grace to get you in the door and then switches to a performance-based system to keep you there. No—it's grace from beginning to end, glory to glory, faith to faith.

This is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

Notice three critical details in this verse:

First: "We all." Not just the super-spiritual. Not just pastors or missionaries or those who seem to have it all together. All of us. Every believer. No exceptions. No special class of Christians who get transformation while others don't.

Second: "Are being transformed." Present continuous tense. It's happening right now, in this moment, as you read these words. You might not feel it. You might not see it. But if you're in Christ, the Spirit is at work in you, conforming you to His image.

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Third: "From glory to glory." Not from shame to glory. Not from failure to glory. From glory to glory. You're not starting from zero. You already possess glory—the glory of being made in God's image, the glory of being indwelt by His Spirit, the glory of being called His child. The transformation is from one degree of glory to an even greater degree.

A.W. Tozer captured this beautifully: "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God." Not an everlasting preoccupation with our performance, our progress, or our problems—but with God Himself. And as we gaze at Him, we're transformed by what we see.

This is the daily reality of the Christian life: God is preparing you. Through every circumstance, every trial, every moment of weakness and every instance of grace—He's shaping, molding, refining, revealing. The marble is being chipped away. The masterpiece is emerging.

Movement Three: PREPARED TO REVEAL (Future)

"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

The ultimate goal of all God's preparation—past and present—is future glory. Not just glory in heaven someday, but glory revealed through us in history and then consummated in eternity.

Paul connects these dots in Romans 8:18-19: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."

Did you catch that? Creation itself is waiting—not for Christ's return (though that too), but for *our* revealing. The universe is on tiptoe, eagerly anticipating the moment when God's children will be fully revealed in glory. When what has been hidden will be made manifest. When the masterpiece will finally be unveiled.

John puts it this way: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

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The best is yet to come. What God has prepared for those who love Him exceeds our wildest imagination. The glory that will be revealed in us is so magnificent that our present sufferings—no matter how intense—pale in comparison.

This is our hope. This is our destiny. This is what God is preparing us for.

The Scandal of Broken Vessels

But here's where it gets wonderfully, shockingly scandalous: God doesn't wait for us to become worthy vessels before He fills us with His glory. He doesn't demand we repair all our cracks before He pours in His treasure. He specializes in using broken things to display His beauty.

Paul declares this mystery in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7: "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves."

Earthen vessels. Clay pots. Fragile, ordinary, easily broken containers holding infinite treasure. That's us. And it's not an accident—it's by design. The fragility of the vessel ensures that no one mistakes the power as coming from the container rather than its contents.

God could have chosen to display His glory through perfect, pristine, indestructible vessels. Instead, He chose us—cracked, leaking, imperfect jars of clay. Why? So that when His light shines through our brokenness, no one can deny the source.

This turns our entire understanding of qualification on its head. We spend so much energy trying to become good enough, strong enough, healed enough, spiritual enough to be used by God. But God is looking for the opposite. He's looking for people who know they're broken, who've given up on self-sufficiency, who've stopped pretending they have it all together.

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Brennan Manning wrote: "In a futile attempt to erase our past, we deprive the community of our healing gift. If we conceal our wounds out of fear and shame, our inner darkness can neither be illuminated nor become a light for others."

Your brokenness isn't a disqualification—it's your qualification. Your wounds aren't weaknesses to hide—they're the very places where God's light shines brightest. Your past isn't a barrier to His glory—it's the canvas on which He paints His grace.

Consider God's track record:

- He used a murderer (Moses) to deliver His people
- He used an adulteress and murderer (David) as a man after His own heart
- He used a prostitute (Rahab) in the lineage of the Messiah
- He used a denier (Peter) as the rock of His church
- He used a persecutor (Paul) as His apostle to the Gentiles

God doesn't just tolerate our brokenness while using us in spite of it. He redeems our brokenness and uses us because of it. He transforms our worst moments into our most powerful testimonies. He takes what was meant for evil and uses it for good.

This is the scandal of grace: God doesn't need your strength—He needs your weakness. He doesn't need your perfection—He needs your surrender. He doesn't need you to have it all together—He needs you to admit that you don't.

From Glory to Glory: How Transformation Happens

So how does this transformation actually work? How do we move from one degree of glory to another?

The answer is beautifully simple and profoundly complex: we behold Him.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Look again at 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

The key word is *beholding*. The Greek word (katoptrizō) carries the idea of gazing intently, reflecting like a mirror, continuous contemplation. This isn't a casual glance. This isn't checking in with God once a week. This is sustained, intentional, worshipful focus on Christ.

And here's the miracle: as we behold Him, we become like Him. Not through effort or striving, but through gazing. Not through self-improvement programs, but through Spirit-empowered contemplation. Transformation happens not by looking at ourselves and trying harder, but by looking at Jesus and being changed by what we see.

John Calvin wrote: "We are nowhere forbidden to laugh, or to be satisfied with food...or to be delighted with music, or to drink wine...But where there is plenty, to wallow in delights, to gorge oneself, to intoxicate mind and heart with present pleasures and be always panting after new ones—such are very far removed from a lawful use of God's gifts...Let this be our principle: that the use of God's gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good, not for our ruin."

Wait—wrong quote. Let me find the right one. Calvin on transformation: "The whole comes to this, that we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do nothing except to his glory."

The transformation process involves several key elements:

We must have unveiled faces. The veil represents anything that blocks our view of Christ—sin, pride, self-righteousness, performance, shame, religious activity that substitutes for relationship. The veil must be removed. Not by our effort, but by His Spirit. "But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:16).

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We must behold Him consistently. This isn't a one-time experience. It's a lifestyle of gazing, contemplating, meditating on who Christ is and what He's done. It's saturating our minds with Scripture, our hearts with worship, our souls with His presence.

We must trust the Spirit's work. Notice the verse says transformation happens "from the Lord, the Spirit." We don't transform ourselves. We can't. But as we position ourselves before Him—as we behold Him with unveiled faces—the Spirit does what we cannot do. He changes us from the inside out.

We must embrace the progressive nature. It's "from glory to glory," not from zero to glory overnight. There will be setbacks. There will be struggles. There will be days when you feel like you're moving backward rather than forward. But the overall trajectory is upward. The general direction is toward greater conformity to Christ.

Jonathan Edwards, in his work on religious affections, wrote: "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections...The Author of human nature has not only given affections to men, but has made them very much the spring of men's actions."

Living in the Reality

This, then, is our calling: to live as God's workmanship, embracing the reality that He has prepared us, is preparing us, and has prepared glory for us beyond imagination.

It means waking up each day knowing you're not a finished product—and that's okay. You're a work in progress, a masterpiece in the making, a vessel being prepared for glory.

It means facing your brokenness with honesty, not shame. Your cracks aren't flaws to hide—they're the places where the light gets in.

It means replacing striving with surrender, performance with presence, self-improvement with Spirit-empowerment.

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It means believing that the God who began the work will complete it. Not might complete it. Not could complete it if you try hard enough. Will complete it. It's certain. It's guaranteed. It's already done from His eternal perspective.

The journey from workmanship to glory isn't about becoming someone new. It's about becoming who you truly are—who you've always been in Christ, hidden beneath layers of lies, wounds, and false identities.

God is in the business of revealing glory. He's been doing it since the beginning, and He's not stopping with you.

The question isn't whether God can transform you. He can and He will.

The question is: will you trust Him in the process? Will you let Him chip away the marble that obscures the masterpiece? Will you keep your face unveiled, your gaze fixed on Him, even when the transformation feels more like demolition?

This is the invitation. This is the journey. This is what it means to be His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand.

Let's walk this path together—from glory to glory, from faith to faith, until the masterpiece is fully revealed.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." — Ephesians 3:20-21 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

PART ONE: THE FOUNDATION OF GLORY

Understanding God's Preparation

CHAPTER 1

His Workmanship—Crafted with Purpose

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."— Ephesians 2:8-10 (NASB)

There's a Greek word buried in Ephesians 2:10 that changes everything.

Poiema.

It's the word Paul uses when he says "we are His workmanship." You might recognize it—it's where we get our English word "poem." But it means far more than verse on a page. In Paul's day, *poiema* referred to a masterpiece, a work of art, something crafted with skill and intention by a master artisan.

Paul is saying something radical here: You are not a mass-produced commodity. You're not a factory item rolling off an assembly line. You're not even a handmade craft project. You are God's *poiema*—His masterpiece, His work of art, His carefully crafted creation designed with purpose and made with love.

But here's what makes this even more stunning: Paul doesn't use *poiema* to describe what we'll become someday if we try hard enough. He uses the present tense. Right now, in your current state—with all your flaws, struggles, doubts, and failures—you *are* His workmanship. Not will be. Not could be if you get your act together. You *are*.

This is where transformation begins: not with what we do for God, but with what God has already done for us.

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The Potter's Hands: God as the Master Craftsman

The image of God as Potter and humanity as clay threads throughout Scripture, but nowhere is it more personal and intimate than in Isaiah 64:8: "Yet, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand."

Notice the progression of intimacy in this single verse. God is first identified as LORD (Yahweh)—the covenant-keeping, eternally faithful God. But He's not just LORD; He's Father. And we're not just any clay; we're *His* clay. He's not just any potter; He's *our* potter. This isn't a distant deity manufacturing products. This is a Father carefully shaping His children.

I once watched a master potter work. His hands moved with such confidence and precision, applying pressure here, smoothing there, knowing exactly when to add water and when to let the clay firm up. But what struck me most was his patience. When the clay resisted, he didn't force it. When it collapsed, he simply gathered it up and started again. He never gave up on a piece, never threw away the clay as unusable.

"Even the failures become something beautiful," he told me. "Sometimes the cracks and imperfections create the most interesting pieces."

This is our God.

The Parable of the Potter's House

In Jeremiah 18:1-6, God gives the prophet a visual lesson that still speaks to us today:

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"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, 'Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you.' Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?' declares the LORD. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand.'"

There are several profound truths embedded in this passage:

First, the Potter is actively working. This isn't a God who wound up the universe and walked away. He's hands-on, engaged, personally involved in the shaping process. Your life isn't on autopilot. God is actively, presently working on you.

Second, vessels get spoiled. The clay doesn't always cooperate. Sometimes it collapses. Sometimes it cracks. Sometimes it resists the pressure. And you know what the potter does? He doesn't throw it away. He doesn't declare it unusable. He *remakes* it. The word in Hebrew suggests completely reforming, starting fresh while using the same material.

Your failures don't surprise God. Your collapses don't frustrate Him. Your resistance doesn't exhaust His patience. He simply gathers you up and begins again. The clay is never wasted.

Third, the Potter has sovereign discretion. "He remade it into another vessel, *as it pleased the potter to make.*" God isn't following your blueprint or working toward your preferred outcome. He's creating something that pleases Him—something that fits His purpose, reveals His glory, accomplishes His will.

This is where we often struggle. We have an idea of what we should become, and we try to force ourselves into that mold. We think we should be the fine china while God is shaping us into a sturdy water jar. We want to be decorative while God is making us functional. We're focused on appearance while God is focused on purpose.

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But here's the liberating truth: the Potter knows what He's making. He knows what the clay can bear. He knows what vessel is needed for the work He has prepared. And He has the skill, the patience, and the authority to create exactly what He envisions.

Fourth, we are clay in His hand—not in our own. We don't shape ourselves. We can't. Clay doesn't mold itself. It responds to external pressure, external artistry, external vision. Our job isn't to become something through our own effort. Our job is to remain pliable in the Potter's hands.

This is simultaneously humbling and freeing. Humbling because it strips away our illusion of control, our belief that we're self-made people. Freeing because it removes the crushing burden of self-transformation. You're not responsible for remaking yourself into something acceptable to God. You're responsible for yielding to the One who is already at work making you into His masterpiece.

The Father-Potter Dynamic

But let's return to Isaiah's language: "You are our Father...You our potter." This combination is crucial. Potters work with clay for various reasons—profit, art, function. But a Father-Potter works with one motivation: love.

God isn't shaping you because He needs you. He's shaping you because He loves you. He's not trying to get something out of you. He's trying to get something into you—His own character, His own glory, His own nature.

And unlike an earthly potter who must work with whatever clay he has, God as Father-Potter chose you. Before you existed, He selected you. Before you did anything right or wrong, He set His love upon you. The clay didn't apply for the position. The Father chose it.

Romans 9:20-21 puts it bluntly: "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

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This isn't about God being arbitrary or capricious. It's about God being sovereign and purposeful. Every vessel has a purpose. Not every vessel is the same, but every vessel is needed. The water jar isn't inferior to the vase. The storage pot isn't less valuable than the serving bowl. Each has its role in the household.

Your purpose might not look like someone else's purpose. Your design might not match your expectations. But you can trust the Father-Potter who is shaping you with intentionality, skill, and unfailing love.

Not Self-Made, But God-Made

We live in a culture that celebrates the self-made person. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Be a self-starter. Create your own destiny. Build your own brand. These aren't just cultural mantras—they've infiltrated the church.

We talk about "making something of ourselves." We admire people who "built themselves from nothing." We create Christian versions of self-help: principles for better living, steps to spiritual success, habits of highly effective believers.

But Paul demolishes this entire framework in three words: "not of yourselves."

Look at the full context of Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Every potential source of human contribution is systematically eliminated:

- Not by grace you earned → by grace given
- Not through faith you generated → through faith as a gift
- Not of yourselves → of God
- Not as a result of works → as a result of grace
- Not so you can boast → so God receives glory

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There's no room here for self-congratulation, no space for pride, no possibility of saying, "I made myself into this." From beginning to end, salvation—and the transformation that follows—is God's work.

The Scandal of Grace

This is the scandal that offends human pride: we contribute nothing to our salvation. Not our goodness. Not our willingness. Not our faith (even faith is a gift, according to this passage). Not our works. Nothing.

C.S. Lewis captured this perfectly: "The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us."

Read that again. Let it sink in. This inverts everything we naturally believe about how relationships work.

In human relationships, love is usually a response to something lovable. We love people because they're attractive, kind, funny, interesting, useful. Love is conditional, earned, deserved.

But God's love doesn't work that way. He doesn't love us because we're good. He loves us, period. And out of that undeserved, unearned, unconditional love, He sets about making us good. Not so that we'll become lovable, but because we're already loved.

This is why grace is so scandalous. It violates our sense of fairness. It makes us uncomfortable. We want to contribute something, to earn some portion of our salvation, to feel like we've pulled our weight.

But grace says: You have nothing to contribute. You bring nothing to the table except your need. Your best efforts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Your righteousness is insufficient (Romans 3:23). Your self-made spirituality is bankrupt (Ephesians 2:1-3).

And yet—and yet—God loves you still. Not because of what you bring, but because of who He is.

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The Gift Nobody Can Earn

Paul emphasizes: "it is the gift of God." Not a reward. Not wages. Not something earned or deserved. A gift.

And what do you do with a gift? You receive it. You don't try to pay for it (that insults the giver). You don't try to deserve it (that misunderstands the nature of a gift). You simply open your hands and receive.

This is the hardest thing in the world for most of us. We'd rather work for it, earn it, prove we deserve it. We're more comfortable with quid pro quo than with unconditional grace.

I've counseled countless people who struggle with this. They can intellectually assent to salvation by grace, but they live as if they're still earning God's favor through performance. They'll say, "I know I'm saved by grace," and then spend the rest of their lives trying to be good enough to keep God happy.

But here's the thing: if you're not good enough to earn salvation in the first place, you're certainly not good enough to maintain it through performance. If grace got you in, only grace can keep you in.

This is why Paul follows the gift announcement with "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." If salvation were even partially earned, we'd find a way to boast about our contribution. "Yes, God saved me, but I was smart enough to accept it." "Yes, God forgave me, but I had the humility to ask." "Yes, God transformed me, but I worked really hard on my sanctification."

No. No boasting. Not even a little. Because it's all gift. All grace. All God.

Martin Luther, who spent years torturing himself trying to earn God's favor through works, finally discovered this truth and it revolutionized his life. He wrote: "This is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive."

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Created FOR Good Works, Not BY Good Works

But now we come to the glorious "therefore" of verse 10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

This is where everything shifts. We're not saved by works, but we are saved for works. We don't earn salvation through good deeds, but good deeds are the inevitable result of genuine salvation.

This distinction is absolutely critical. It's the difference between legalism and grace, between slavery and freedom, between striving and resting.

The Distinction That Changes Everything

Think of it this way: A tree doesn't produce fruit to become a tree. It produces fruit because it is a tree. The fruit isn't the cause of its tree-ness; it's the evidence of it.

Similarly, we don't do good works to become God's children. We do good works because we are God's children. The works aren't the cause of our identity; they're the expression of it.

This transforms everything:

Legalism says: Do these works to earn God's acceptance. **Grace says:** You're already accepted; now live out of that identity.

Legalism says: Your works determine your worth. **Grace says:** Your worth determines your works.

Legalism says: Perform to be loved. **Grace says:** You're loved, so you're free to perform for the right reasons.

Legalism says: The quality of your works proves your salvation. **Grace says:** The presence of works evidences your salvation; their quality is being perfected.

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Romans 8:29 deepens this: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren."

Notice the progression: foreknew → predestined → conformed. God's plan from eternity past was not just to save you from hell, but to transform you into the image of Christ. The good works He's prepared for you aren't arbitrary tasks on a divine to-do list. They're the specific expressions of Christlikeness that fit your unique design, circumstances, and calling.

From Slavery to Sonship

Paul explores this distinction beautifully in Galatians. In chapter 4, he contrasts two ways of relating to God:

"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (Galatians 4:4-7).

Under law, you're a slave working to earn approval. Under grace, you're a son working from approval. The slave obeys out of fear and obligation. The son obeys out of love and gratitude. The slave earns his keep. The son inherits a kingdom.

Same actions, perhaps—both might obey, both might work hard, both might do "good things." But the motivation, the source, and the result are completely different.

When you understand you're God's workmanship—His *poiema*, His masterpiece—created in Christ Jesus for good works, you stop trying to prove yourself and start expressing yourself. You stop performing for acceptance and start performing from acceptance.

This doesn't lead to laziness or license. It leads to freedom and fruitfulness.

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J.I. Packer wrote: "The revelation to the believer that God is his Father is in a sense the climax of the Bible, just as it was in a sense the climax of Jesus' ministry...You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father."

The Prepared Path

Now we arrive at perhaps the most overlooked phrase in Ephesians 2:10: "which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

The good works aren't just for you to do—they're works that God prepared beforehand. Before you existed. Before you believed. Before you even knew you needed saving, God was already preparing specific works for you to accomplish.

Think about the sovereignty and intentionality in that statement. God isn't making it up as He goes. He's not improvising your purpose. He had a plan before time began.

The Pre-Planned Purpose

This means several crucial things:

First, your purpose is specific. God didn't prepare generic good works for generic Christians. He prepared specific works for you—works that fit your design, your gifts, your experiences, your circumstances, your personality, your calling.

You're not supposed to do everyone's good works. You're supposed to do yours. The works God prepared for you might not look like the works He prepared for your pastor, your spouse, your small group leader, or that super-spiritual person you admire. That's okay. Actually, it's more than okay—it's by design.

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Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 12 with his body metaphor. The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." The ear can't do the work of the foot. Each part has its role, and the body only functions properly when each part does its specific job.

Second, your preparation is comprehensive. God doesn't just prepare the works; He prepares you for the works. Every experience—good and bad, pleasant and painful, success and failure—is part of His preparation process.

That season of suffering you went through? God was preparing you to comfort others with the comfort you received (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). That wilderness experience that nearly destroyed you? God was preparing you to lead others out of their wildernesses. That failure that humiliated you? God was preparing you to minister with humility and authenticity.

Nothing is wasted in God's economy. Every piece of your story—including the chapters you wish you could erase—is part of the preparation.

A.B. Simpson captured this beautifully: "God is preparing his heroes; and when the opportunity comes, he can fit them into their places in a moment, and the world will wonder where they came from."

Where did David come from when he faced Goliath? From the shepherd's field, where God had prepared him fighting lions and bears that nobody saw. Where did Joseph come from when he saved Egypt and his family? From a prison cell, where God had prepared him through years of unjust suffering. Where did Paul come from when he became the apostle to the Gentiles? From a life of persecuting Christians, where God was preparing him to understand both law and grace.

You're being prepared right now. In your obscurity. In your struggles. In your seeming insignificance. God is preparing His hero, and when the opportunity comes—when your moment arrives—you'll be ready, and people will wonder where you came from.

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Third, your responsibility is simple: walk in them. Not create them. Not earn them. Not discover them through intense seeking. Walk in them.

The works are already there, prepared, laid out like a path. Your job is to walk the path, not to build it. This removes so much pressure. You're not responsible for figuring out God's will for your life through some complex formula. You're responsible for walking in step with the Spirit, and as you do, you'll naturally find yourself doing the works He prepared.

It's like those nature trails where the path is already cleared, marked with signs, maintained by park rangers. You don't have to bushwhack your way through the forest. You just follow the path. And as you walk it, you discover beautiful vistas, interesting wildlife, refreshing streams—all exactly where they were placed for you to experience.

The Walking Life

The word "walk" is significant. It implies:

Daily progression. You don't run the Christian life in a sprint; you walk it as a marathon. One step at a time. One day at a time. One work at a time.

Natural movement. Walking is your natural mode of transportation. The good works God prepared aren't meant to feel forced or fake. As you mature in Christ, doing these works becomes as natural as walking.

Sustained direction. You walk toward something. There's a destination, a purpose, a goal. The works aren't random; they're directional, moving you and others toward God's intended end.

Visible testimony. When you walk, people see where you're going. Your life becomes a testimony, a visible demonstration of God's transforming work. This is what Paul means when he says in Ephesians 5:8, "walk as children of Light."

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Colossians 1:10 expands this: "So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Notice the order: walk → please Him → bear fruit → increase in knowledge. It's not: gain knowledge → bear fruit → then you'll please Him → then you can walk. No, it starts with walking. And as you walk in the prepared works, everything else follows.

Living as His Workmanship

So what does this mean for your life today?

It means you can stop striving to become someone God can use. He's already using you. Right now. In your imperfection. With all your flaws. You're His workmanship—present tense, current reality.

It means you can stop comparing your works to others' works. God prepared different works for different people. Your calling doesn't have to look like anyone else's calling. Your impact doesn't have to match their impact. Your path doesn't have to mirror their path.

It means you can stop trying to earn what's already been given. You're not working for salvation; you're working from salvation. You're not earning love; you're responding to love already poured out.

It means you can embrace the preparation process. The Potter is at the wheel. The Father is shaping His child. The Master Craftsman is creating His masterpiece. And He knows exactly what He's doing, even when you don't understand the process.

It means you can trust the prepared path. The works are already there. The purpose is already established. The plan is already in place. Your job isn't to figure it all out; it's to walk in step with the Spirit and trust that you'll find yourself exactly where you're supposed to be.

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Charles Spurgeon once said: "You say, 'If I could believe, Christ would save me.' Christ will save you if you do believe. But the very faith which is the instrument of your salvation must first be given to you by God; you cannot originate it yourself. Faith is not a matter of your own producing; it is the gift of God. The faith that saves the soul is not what man produces by his own effort, but what God creates in the heart."

This is the foundation: You are His workmanship. Not self-made. Not self-improved. Not self-anything. His workmanship. His *poiema*. His masterpiece.

The Potter has you in His hands. Trust the process. Walk the path. Rest in the grace. You're being crafted with purpose, prepared for glory, shaped for works that will reveal His image to a watching world.

And the Master Craftsman? He never fails to complete what He starts.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." — 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 2

What Eye Has Not Seen—The Incomprehensible Preparation

"But just as it is written: 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.' For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." — 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 (NASB)

There's a certain kind of spiritual exhaustion that comes from thinking too small.

I see it all the time in people who've been ground down by religious systems that reduced the Christian life to a manageable checklist. Go to church. Read your Bible. Pray. Don't sin. Repeat. Their expectations of God have been downsized to fit within the cramped confines of what they can imagine, understand, and control.

They've settled for a god they can comprehend—which, by definition, is no god at all.

But Paul refuses to let us stay there. In one breathtaking sentence, he blows apart every limitation we've placed on God's capacity to surprise, delight, and overwhelm us with His goodness. He's quoting Isaiah 64:4, but he's doing more than just referencing an old promise. He's declaring a present reality: God has prepared things for you that exceed the capacity of your eyes to see, your ears to hear, your imagination to conceive.

Not will prepare. Has prepared. Past tense. Already done. Waiting for you.

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And the scope of this preparation? It transcends human perception entirely. The best your eyes have ever seen doesn't compare. The most beautiful sound your ears have ever heard doesn't come close. The most magnificent thing you've ever imagined doesn't even enter the conversation.

This is the God we serve. Not a God who meets our expectations, but a God who shatters them. Not a God who gives us what we ask for, but a God who gives us what we cannot even think to ask for.

Beyond Human Imagination

Let's be honest: we're not very good at imagining glory.

Our minds naturally gravitate toward the comfortable, the familiar, the controllable. When we think about heaven, we picture an upgraded version of earth—better weather, nicer houses, reunions with loved ones, maybe some clouds and harps thrown in for good measure. When we think about God's plans for our lives, we imagine slightly improved versions of our current circumstances—same job but with better pay, same relationships but with less conflict, same life but with fewer problems.

But this is thinking far, far too small.

The Limitation of Human Perception

The problem isn't just that we lack information. The problem is that we lack categories. We're trying to comprehend the infinite with finite minds, to grasp the eternal with temporal understanding, to imagine the glory of God with imaginations shaped by a fallen world.

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It's like asking a caterpillar to imagine flight. The caterpillar has no frame of reference for what it means to be a butterfly. It can't conceive of soaring through the air, seeing the world from above, experiencing the freedom of wings. The caterpillar's entire existence has been about crawling, about staying close to the ground, about the slow, earthbound movement from leaf to leaf.

And then metamorphosis happens.

Everything the caterpillar thought it knew about existence gets turned inside out. What emerges from the cocoon isn't just an improved caterpillar—it's something completely other, operating in a realm the caterpillar couldn't have imagined.

This is Paul's point. What God has prepared for us isn't just quantitatively better than what we know—it's qualitatively different. It's not just more of the same; it's something entirely other.

Isaiah 55:8-9 establishes this principle: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Notice the comparison: as the heavens are higher than the earth. This isn't a small gap. This isn't a difference in degree, but a difference in kind. When you stand on earth and look up at the sky, you're not measuring a distance that can be bridged by building a really tall ladder. You're looking at a gulf that requires an entirely different mode of existence to cross.

This is the distance between God's thoughts and our thoughts. Between His ways and our ways. Between His preparation and our imagination.

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The Danger of Domesticated Expectations

Here's what happens when we forget this: we reduce God to manageable proportions. We create a deity who thinks like us, values what we value, plans according to our logic. And then we're disappointed when He doesn't perform according to our script.

How many people have walked away from faith because God didn't meet their expectations? They prayed for healing, and the healing didn't come—at least not in the form they expected. They asked for provision, and it didn't arrive—at least not through the channel they anticipated. They sought direction, and it wasn't clear—at least not according to their timeline.

And in their disappointment, they concluded that either God doesn't exist, doesn't care, or isn't powerful enough to deliver.

But what if the problem isn't God's absence or impotence? What if the problem is our cramped imagination, our inability to conceive of what God is actually doing?

J.R.R. Tolkien, in a letter to his son, wrote something profound about this: "It is not the strength of the body that counts, but the strength of the spirit." And about God's ways, he said, "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism."

But perhaps C.S. Lewis said it even more directly: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

We were made for another world. Which means that what satisfies us in this world is only the faintest echo of what God has actually prepared for us in the next.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Threefold Limitation

Paul's language is precise. He doesn't just say, "You can't imagine it." He breaks down human perception into three categories and declares that all three are inadequate:

"Eye has not seen." The visual realm. Everything you've ever witnessed—every sunset, every mountain vista, every piece of art, every beautiful face, every stunning landscape. All of it—all of it—falls short of what God has prepared.

"Ear has not heard." The auditory realm. Every symphony, every song, every word of love, every sound of laughter, every comforting voice. None of it compares to what's coming.

"Has not entered the human heart." The imaginative realm. This is the most devastating limitation. Even your wildest dreams, your most extravagant fantasies, your most soaring hopes—they haven't even touched the edges of what God has prepared.

It's not that you've seen it but forgotten. It's not that you've heard rumors that might be true. It's not that you've had inklings that point in the right direction. No—it hasn't even entered your heart. You don't have categories for it. You can't conceptualize it. It's beyond the reach of human imagination entirely.

This should simultaneously humble us and thrill us.

Humble us because we need to stop pretending we've got God figured out. Stop reducing Him to our theological systems, our doctrinal formulas, our comfortable categories. The moment you think you've got God contained in a box, you're no longer dealing with God—you're dealing with an idol of your own making.

But thrill us because if God has prepared things beyond our wildest imagination, then our disappointments with the present might not be evidence of His absence but evidence of His abundance yet to be revealed. The ache you feel for "something more" isn't evidence that God has failed to satisfy; it's evidence that He's created you for a satisfaction that transcends this world.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Revealing Spirit

But here's where it gets interesting—and hopeful. Paul doesn't stop with "you can't imagine it." He continues: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit."

Notice the transition. Yes, these things are beyond human perception. Yes, they exceed human imagination. But they're not hidden. They're not unknowable. They're *revealed*.

The word Paul uses for "revealed" (*apokalyptō*) means to uncover, to unveil, to make manifest what was previously hidden. This is the word we get "apocalypse" from—not in the sense of catastrophe, but in the sense of revelation, disclosure, making known.

What you cannot discover, God discloses. What you cannot perceive, God reveals. What you cannot imagine, God unveils—through His Spirit.

The Spirit as Revealer

Look at the full context of 1 Corinthians 2:10-12: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God."

This is staggering. The Holy Spirit doesn't just know about God's thoughts—He searches the *depths* of God. He has access to the innermost counsel of the Divine. He knows what God has prepared because He's part of the preparation process. He's not a consultant brought in after the fact; He's the very presence of God dwelling within us.

And Paul's analogy is brilliant: Just as only your own spirit knows your innermost thoughts, only God's Spirit knows God's innermost thoughts. I don't know what you're really thinking unless you choose to reveal it to me. I might guess. I might infer from your behavior. But I don't have direct access to your internal world.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

But God's Spirit does have direct access to God's internal world. And that same Spirit now lives in you, if you're in Christ. Which means you have access to revelation that would otherwise be impossible.

This isn't some mystical, detached experience. This is the promise Jesus made in John 16:13-14: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you."

The Spirit's job is disclosure. Revelation. Making known. And specifically, He reveals Christ—His character, His work, His plans, His glory.

Personal Revelation, Not Just Propositional

But here's what we need to understand: the Spirit doesn't just reveal information. He reveals a Person. He doesn't just teach doctrine; He unveils Christ.

There's a difference between knowing *about* someone and knowing someone. I can read a biography of Winston Churchill and know facts about him—his accomplishments, his quotes, his historical impact. But I don't know Churchill. He's dead, and I never met him when he was alive. I have information, but I don't have relationship.

The Spirit doesn't give us more information about a distant God. He gives us intimate knowledge of a present God. He doesn't just teach us truths; He introduces us to Truth Himself. He doesn't just explain what God has prepared; He gives us foretastes, previews, glimpses of the glory to come.

This is what Paul means when he says in Ephesians 1:17-18: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The eyes of your heart. Not your physical eyes. Not your intellectual capacity. Your heart. The Spirit enlightens your spiritual perception so you can begin to grasp—not fully, but truly—what God has prepared.

The Spirit as Guide

Jesus describes the Spirit as a guide: "He will guide you into all the truth." The word "guide" (hodēgeō) means to lead the way, to direct someone along a path. It's not instantaneous transportation. It's progressive leading, step by step, deeper and deeper into understanding.

This means the Christian life is one of continuous revelation. You don't learn everything at conversion. You don't master the mysteries of God after your first Bible study or your first spiritual retreat. The Spirit guides you *into* truth—it's a journey, a process, a gradual unveiling.

And this should relieve so much pressure. You're not supposed to have it all figured out right now. You're not supposed to fully comprehend what God has prepared. You're being led, step by step, deeper and deeper into mysteries that will take eternity to fully explore.

A.W. Tozer wrote: "Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow."

The Spirit's work is to progressively shape what comes into our minds when we think about God—not based on our limited imaginations, but based on divine revelation.

The Spirit Makes the Incomprehensible Comprehensible

Here's the paradox: what's incomprehensible to human perception becomes comprehensible through spiritual revelation. Not fully—we still see "in a mirror dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12)—but truly.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Spirit doesn't just tell you about God's preparation; He gives you a hunger for it. He creates an ache in your soul for the "something more" that you can't quite name but know is real. He produces desires in you that this world can't satisfy—which is evidence that you were made for another world.

C.S. Lewis captured this in *The Weight of Glory*: "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

The Spirit's work is to make us dissatisfied with mud pies. To create in us a hunger for the holiday at the sea that we didn't even know existed. To expand our capacity for joy so that we're ready to receive what God has prepared.

Prepared for Those Who Love Him

Now we come to a crucial qualifier: "all that God has prepared for those who love Him."

Not for those who know about Him. Not for those who study Him. Not for those who perform for Him. For those who *love* Him.

This is the prerequisite. This is the qualification. This is what matters.

The Intimacy Requirement

Knowledge is important. Understanding matters. Theology has its place. But none of it substitutes for love. You can know all the right doctrines and miss the heart of God. You can have perfect theology and have no relationship with the God that theology describes.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Jesus Himself said to the religious experts of His day: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:39-40).

They had the Scriptures memorized. They could debate fine points of law. They were theological experts. But they didn't love Him. They studied the menu without wanting the meal. They examined the map without taking the journey. They analyzed the love letter without loving the Author.

And they missed everything.

C.S. Lewis nailed this: "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

This is the scandal: God has not prepared things for those who are theologically sophisticated, morally upright, or spiritually impressive. He's prepared things for those who love Him. Period.

And love, by its very nature, is relational. It's not primarily intellectual or moral or performance-based. It's heart-to-heart, person-to-Person, intimate and vulnerable.

What Does It Mean to Love God?

This is where we need to be careful, because "love" in our culture has been so diluted that it can mean almost anything. We love pizza. We love our favorite sports team. We love a good movie. The word has lost its weight.

But biblical love—the kind Paul is talking about here—is far more than emotional affection or sentimental attachment. The Greek word (agapaō) speaks of committed, self-giving, sacrificial love. The kind of love that chooses the good of the beloved regardless of cost.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Jesus defined it in John 14:21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me." Love isn't just feeling warm fuzzies about Jesus. It's obeying Him, following Him, ordering your life around Him.

But here's the beautiful part: this isn't cold duty. It's responsive devotion. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Our love for God is always a response to His love for us. We're not manufacturing affection to earn His favor. We're responding to favor already granted.

And that response—that love—is what positions us to receive what He's prepared.

Think of it this way: God has prepared a feast. But if you don't love the Host, you won't enjoy the meal. You might eat out of obligation or duty, but you won't savor it. The food is prepared for those who delight in the Host's presence, who long for fellowship with Him, who find their joy in Him.

Love as Capacity

Here's another dimension: love actually increases our capacity to receive what God has prepared. The person who loves God deeply can receive and enjoy what the person with shallow affection cannot.

It's like music. Someone with no musical training might enjoy a simple melody. But a trained musician hears layers of complexity, subtle harmonies, sophisticated techniques that the untrained ear misses entirely. Both can hear the music, but only one has the capacity to fully appreciate it.

Love for God is like that. It expands your capacity. It fine-tunes your spiritual hearing. It sharpens your perception. It makes you capable of receiving and enjoying revelations that would be lost on someone with less love.

This is why Jesus kept emphasizing love as the greatest commandment. Not just because God demands it, but because love is the key that unlocks everything else. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

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All your heart—your emotions, your affections, your desires. All your soul—your will, your choices, your commitments. All your mind—your thoughts, your understanding, your focus.

Total love. Complete devotion. Wholehearted commitment.

And to those who love Him like that? He reveals what He's prepared. Not because He's withholding it from others, but because they're the only ones with capacity to receive it.

Augustine famously prayed: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

That restlessness is the Spirit creating hunger. The rest is finding what He's prepared. And the path from restlessness to rest is love.

Already-But-Not-Yet Glory

We need to address a tension that runs through all of Paul's writing about glory: we already possess it, but we don't yet fully experience it. We're already glorified (Romans 8:30), but we're still waiting for glory to be revealed (Romans 8:18). We already have eternal life (1 John 5:11-12), but we're still looking forward to the age to come.

This is the "already-but-not-yet" reality of the Kingdom of God.

Present Preparation, Future Revelation

Paul captures this tension perfectly in Romans 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Notice: the glory that *is to be revealed*. Future tense. It's coming. It's certain. But it's not fully here yet.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is crucial for maintaining hope in the midst of suffering. If we expected full glory now, we'd be constantly disappointed. Every hardship would feel like evidence of God's absence. Every struggle would suggest God's promises failed.

But Paul says: don't compare present sufferings with future glory. They're not even in the same category. It's like comparing a paper cut to winning the lottery—the scales don't balance. The suffering is real but temporary. The glory is real and eternal.

And here's the mind-bending part: we're not waiting for glory to begin. We're waiting for glory to be fully revealed. It's already present in seed form. Already at work in hidden ways. Already transforming us "from glory to glory." But the full revelation—when what's been hidden becomes manifest—is still future.

Hidden Life, Coming Revelation

Colossians 3:3-4 gives us another angle on this: "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Your life is hidden. Right now. At this moment. Your truest identity, your deepest reality, your ultimate destiny—it's all hidden with Christ in God.

This means that what you see when you look in the mirror isn't the full truth. The struggles you face aren't the complete story. The circumstances that seem to define you don't tell the whole tale. There's a hidden dimension to your existence that's more real than what's visible.

You are, right now, a child of God (1 John 3:1). You are, right now, seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). You are, right now, the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). You are, right now, more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37).

But none of that is fully visible yet. It's hidden.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

When will it be revealed? "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed." At His return. At the consummation of all things. At the moment when what's hidden breaks through into full visibility.

And what happens then? "Then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Not: then you will become glorious. Then you will be *revealed* as glorious. The glory is already present. It's just waiting to be unveiled.

Living in the Tension

This creates a particular way of living—one foot in the present reality, one foot in the future hope. Not so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good, but so aware of coming glory that present suffering doesn't crush us.

Paul models this throughout his letters:

- "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16)
- "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17)
- "We groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23)

Notice the realism. He doesn't pretend the outer man isn't decaying. He doesn't deny the affliction. He doesn't ignore the groaning. But he puts it all in context. The decay is temporary; the renewal is ongoing. The affliction is light and momentary; the glory is weighty and eternal. The groaning is present; the redemption is certain.

This is how we live in the already-but-not-yet. We acknowledge the pain without being defined by it. We face the struggle without being defeated by it. We endure the suffering without being destroyed by it.

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Why? Because we know what's coming. We know what God has prepared. We've had previews, foretastes, glimpses through the Spirit. And those previews create an unshakeable hope that sustains us through anything this world throws at us.

The Groaning and the Glory

Romans 8 ties all of this together in one of the most profound passages in all of Scripture. Paul speaks of three kinds of groaning:

Creation groans (v. 22): "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." The entire universe is waiting for redemption, straining toward the glory that's coming.

We groan (v. 23): "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Even though we have the Spirit—even though we've tasted the first fruits of glory—we still groan, still wait, still long for completion.

The Spirit groans (v. 26): "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Even the Spirit groans on our behalf, interceding with wordless yearning.

All of creation, all of God's children, and the Spirit Himself—all groaning. Not in despair, but in anticipation. Like a woman in labor who groans not because hope is lost, but because new life is coming.

And what are we groaning for? The revelation of what God has prepared. The unveiling of hidden glory. The manifestation of sons of God. The redemption of our bodies. The restoration of all things.

It's coming. It's certain. It's nearer now than when we first believed (Romans 13:11).

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Living Toward the Incomprehensible

So what do we do with all this? How do we live in light of preparations we can't comprehend and glory we haven't yet seen?

First, we cultivate humility. We admit we don't have God figured out. We confess that His ways are higher than our ways. We embrace the mystery rather than demanding explanations for everything.

Second, we develop hunger. We let the Spirit create in us a holy dissatisfaction with anything less than God Himself. We stop settling for mud pies and start longing for the holiday at the sea.

Third, we pursue love. We make knowing God and loving Him the central pursuit of our lives. Not just knowing about Him, but knowing Him. Not just believing right things, but loving the right Person.

Fourth, we live with hope. We endure present suffering with the knowledge that it's producing future glory. We keep our eyes fixed on what's coming, not just what's here. We remember that the best is yet to come.

Fifth, we stay open to the Spirit's revelation. We position ourselves to receive what He wants to reveal. We read Scripture not just for information but for transformation. We pray not just for things but for God Himself. We worship not out of duty but out of delight.

And we wait. With groaning and with hope. With struggle and with confidence. With present pain and future certainty.

Because eye has not seen, ear has not heard, imagination has not conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.

But the Spirit is revealing it, bit by bit, glory to glory, until the day when Christ is revealed and we are revealed with Him in glory.

And on that day, we'll realize that even our wildest hopes were far too small.

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"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." — 1 John 3:2-3 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 3

The Power of the Gospel—From Faith to Faith

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" — Romans 1:16-17 (NASB)

I've met countless people who treat salvation like a one-time transaction.

They prayed the prayer. They walked the aisle. They signed the card. And now they're waiting—waiting for heaven, waiting for death, waiting for Jesus to return. In the meantime, they're trying to be good Christians, trying to avoid sin, trying to maintain their salvation through careful behavior management.

They understand that the gospel saved them. But they've never grasped that the gospel continues to save them, day after day, moment by moment, glory to glory.

They've reduced the most explosive, transformative force in the universe to a ticket punched, a transaction completed, a legal status achieved. And then they wonder why their Christian life feels powerless, why transformation seems so slow, why they're stuck in the same patterns year after year.

But Paul won't let us stay there. When he declares "I am not ashamed of the gospel," he's not just talking about an evangelistic message we use to get people saved. He's talking about an ongoing power source that continues to work salvation—complete salvation, holistic salvation, transformative salvation—throughout our entire lives.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The gospel isn't just the door you walk through to enter Christianity. It's the power that sustains you, transforms you, and propels you forward every single day you're a Christian. It's not the starting line; it's the entire race. It's not the foundation alone; it's the foundation, the framework, and the finishing work all at once.

And this gospel—this explosive, world-altering, life-transforming message—reveals the righteousness of God "from faith to faith." Not from faith to works. Not from faith to sight. Not from faith to arrival. From faith to faith. One degree of faith to another. One level of trust to the next. One stage of dependence to a deeper stage of dependence.

This is the power that prepares us for glory.

The Gospel's Ongoing Revelation

Let's start by dismantling a dangerous misconception: that the gospel is only for unbelievers.

This lie—and it is a lie—has crippled the church. It's created Christians who know the gospel got them in the door but think they have to maintain their position through performance. It's produced believers who understand that Christ's righteousness justified them initially but think their own righteousness sustains them daily. It's generated followers who know grace saved them but think works sanctify them.

And it's all backwards.

The Gospel: Past, Present, and Future

The gospel is the good news about what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ. It's comprehensive. It addresses all of your existence—past, present, and future.

Past: The gospel declares that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is objective historical fact. It happened outside of you, independent of your feelings or performance. Your salvation is grounded in completed work, not your ongoing effort.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Present: The gospel declares that this same power that raised Christ from the dead is now at work in you (Ephesians 1:19-20). Salvation isn't just a past event you remember; it's a present reality you experience. The gospel continues to work, continues to save, continues to transform.

Future: The gospel declares that what God began in you, He will complete (Philippians 1:6). Your final salvation, your ultimate glorification, your complete transformation—it's guaranteed. Not because you'll hold on tightly enough, but because God holds you securely.

This threefold reality means the gospel is always relevant. You never graduate beyond your need for the gospel. You never reach a level of spiritual maturity where you can say, "Okay, I've got the gospel down. Now let's move on to advanced Christianity."

There is no advanced Christianity beyond the gospel. The gospel *is* advanced Christianity.

Philippians 1:6: The Guarantee of Completion

Paul writes with absolute confidence: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

Notice several crucial elements in this promise:

"I am confident." Not hopeful. Not wishful. Not fingers-crossed optimistic. Confident. Paul has certainty, not because he's evaluated the believers in Philippi and determined they're strong enough to make it, but because he knows the character of the God who started the work.

"He who began." God is the initiator. You didn't start this work. Your salvation wasn't your idea, your plan, your achievement. God began it. Before you were born, before you believed, before you even knew you needed saving—God was already at work.

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"A good work." Not many works. Not separate, disconnected projects. One good work with many dimensions. Your salvation, sanctification, and glorification are all part of the same divine project. God isn't starting over every morning. He's continuing the work He began.

"Will perfect it." The Greek word (epiteleō) means to bring to completion, to accomplish fully, to finish. This isn't uncertain. It's not conditional on your performance. God *will* complete what He started. Not might. Not could if you cooperate enough. Will.

"Until the day of Christ Jesus." There's an end point. A completion date. The day when Christ returns and all things are made new. Until then, the work continues. You're under construction. You're a masterpiece in progress. And the Master Craftsman never abandons a project.

This should simultaneously relieve pressure and raise hope. Relieve pressure because your transformation doesn't depend on your effort. Raise hope because completion is guaranteed.

Not Just Initial, But Continuous

Here's where many Christians get stuck. They understand that the gospel saved them from the penalty of sin. But they think they're responsible for saving themselves from the power of sin through their own effort.

This creates an impossible burden. You're supposed to defeat sin, develop character, grow in holiness, and become more like Christ—all through self-generated willpower and religious disciplines. And when you fail (which you inevitably will), you either double down on effort or collapse in despair.

But the gospel addresses both penalty and power. Christ didn't just die to forgive your sins; He rose to break their power. The same Spirit who regenerated you continues to sanctify you. The same grace that justified you continues to transform you.

Romans 6:14 makes this explicit: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Did you catch that? The reason sin won't master you isn't that you're under a stricter law or a more rigorous discipline. The reason is grace. Grace isn't just the beginning of your Christian life; it's the power source that drives your entire Christian life.

Jerry Bridges, in his book *The Discipline of Grace*, writes: "Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace."

Every day—good or bad, victorious or defeated, strong or weak—you need the gospel. Not a different message. Not an advanced teaching. The same gospel that saved you continues to sanctify you.

This is why Paul could say to the Galatians: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). What was the "different gospel" they were embracing? The idea that they started with grace but needed to add works to complete their salvation.

Paul calls this desertion. It's abandoning the gospel entirely, even while thinking you're being faithful to it.

The gospel must continue to be your foundation, your power source, your daily sustenance. Not just the milk you drank as a baby Christian, but the solid food that nourishes you as a mature believer.

From Faith to Faith: The Progressive Nature

Now we come to one of the most intriguing phrases in Paul's theology: "from faith to faith."

What does this mean? How do you go from faith to faith? Isn't faith faith? You either believe or you don't, right?

Not exactly.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Dynamic Nature of Faith

Faith isn't static. It's not a binary switch—off or on, absent or present. Faith is dynamic, growing, developing, maturing. It has stages, levels, degrees.

Jesus Himself spoke of "little faith" (Matthew 6:30), "great faith" (Matthew 8:10), and faith "as a mustard seed" that grows (Matthew 17:20). Paul talked about being "weak in faith" (Romans 14:1) and "strong in faith" (Romans 4:20). Clearly, faith comes in different measures and intensities.

But "from faith to faith" is saying something even more profound. It's not just that your faith can be stronger or weaker. It's that faith itself is the pathway. You move from one expression of faith to a deeper expression of faith. From one level of trust to a more mature level of trust. From faith to... more faith.

It's like climbing a mountain. Each step requires faith—faith that the ground will hold, faith that the path is true, faith that the summit is reachable. But as you climb higher, you're not leaving faith behind. You're exercising faith at a different level. The faith that got you to basecamp isn't different in kind from the faith needed for the summit; it's faith at a different altitude, in thinner air, with higher stakes.

The Parallel: From Glory to Glory

This "from faith to faith" language parallels another Pauline phrase: "from glory to glory."

2 Corinthians 3:18 says: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

From glory to glory. From faith to faith. From one degree to another. From one level to the next.

This is the progressive nature of transformation. You don't go from zero to complete in one leap. You don't move from darkness to full light instantaneously. There's a progression, a journey, a gradual revealing of what was always true but not always visible.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Think of a sunrise. Dawn doesn't arrive all at once. First there's darkness. Then the faintest hint of light on the horizon. Then more light. Then color. Then the sun breaks the horizon. Then full day. Each stage has glory—but the glory increases, deepens, becomes more manifest as the sun rises.

This is your transformation. From glory to glory. From one stage of reflecting Christ to a deeper stage. From one level of Christlikeness to greater Christlikeness. Not by your effort, but by beholding Him. Not through striving, but through gazing. Not by working harder, but by seeing more clearly.

And the mechanism? Faith. From faith to faith. Each new level of faith opens up new vistas of glory. Each deeper trust reveals more of Christ's character. Each stage of believing creates capacity for greater transformation.

Faith as the Channel, Not the Source

But here's what's crucial: faith isn't the power source. Faith is the channel. It's the means by which God's power flows into your life, but it's not the power itself.

Think of faith like an electrical cord. The cord doesn't generate electricity; it conducts it from the source to the appliance. A thick, high-quality cord can conduct more power than a thin, damaged one. But even the best cord without connection to the power source is useless.

This is why Paul says the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel "from faith to faith." Faith is how we receive the revelation. Faith is how we access the righteousness. Faith is how we connect to the power. But faith itself isn't the source—God is.

This matters because we can mistakenly turn faith into a work. We can start measuring our faith, analyzing its strength, worrying about its adequacy. We can make faith itself the object of our faith, which is a recipe for anxiety and introspection.

But faith is meant to be simple trust in a trustworthy God. It's not complex. It's not mysterious. It's childlike dependence on a faithful Father.

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Oswald Chambers captured this beautifully: "Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading."

Read that again. Faith doesn't need to know the destination. It doesn't need to understand the plan. It doesn't need to see the next ten steps. It just needs to know the Guide. To love the Leader. To trust the One who's doing the leading.

This is the faith that receives revelation. This is the faith that's transformed from glory to glory. This is the faith that channels the righteousness of God into your life.

Growing in Faith

So how does faith grow? How do you move from faith to faith?

Not by trying harder to believe. You can't manufacture faith through willpower. You can't force yourself to trust more through self-generated effort.

Faith grows through exposure to the Faithful One. The more you see of God's character, the more you trust. The more you experience His faithfulness, the deeper your dependence. The more you know Him, the more you rest in Him.

This is why the Word is so crucial. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Faith grows as you hear more about Christ. Not just information about Him, but revelation of Him. Not just facts to memorize, but truth that transforms.

This is why prayer is essential. Prayer isn't just asking God for things. It's communing with God, exposing yourself to His presence, allowing His Spirit to shape your desires and expand your trust.

This is why trials are valuable. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

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Trials don't create faith, but they test it, strengthen it, mature it. Like a muscle that grows through resistance training, faith develops through the resistance of difficulty.

And through it all—Word, prayer, trials, experiences—the Spirit is at work, increasing your capacity to trust, deepening your ability to depend, moving you from faith to faith, from glory to glory.

The Righteousness of God Revealed

Now we need to tackle one of the most misunderstood concepts in Christianity: righteousness.

Most Christians, if they're honest, think righteousness is about their moral performance. They think it's about doing right things, avoiding wrong things, living up to God's standards. And they think transformation is about getting better at being righteous through their own effort.

But that's not what Paul is talking about here at all.

Not Your Righteousness, But His

Look carefully at Romans 1:17: "For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."

Not the righteousness of man. Not your righteousness. The righteousness *of God*. This is a game-changer.

Paul expands this in Philippians 3:9, where he describes his goal as "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith."

Paul explicitly contrasts two kinds of righteousness:

1. A righteousness of his own, derived from law-keeping, based on performance
2. The righteousness from God, received through faith, based on Christ's work

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And Paul doesn't just prefer the second option over the first. He counts the first as "loss" and "rubbish" compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ and being found in Him with God's righteousness (Philippians 3:7-9).

Why? Because any righteousness you generate yourself is inadequate, unstable, and ultimately damning. Isaiah 64:6 declares that "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Your best efforts, your most impressive moral achievements, your greatest spiritual victories—they're insufficient to meet God's standard.

But the righteousness that comes from God—the righteousness of Christ credited to you through faith—is perfect, complete, and eternally secure.

Imputed and Imparted

Theologians distinguish between two aspects of this righteousness: imputed and imparted.

Imputed righteousness is the righteousness of Christ credited to your account through faith. This is justification. At the moment of belief, God declares you righteous based on Christ's perfect obedience, not your imperfect performance. This is a legal declaration, a change in status, a courtroom verdict: "Not guilty!"

2 Corinthians 5:21 captures this: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

There's an exchange: Christ takes your sin; you receive His righteousness. Christ bears your guilt; you receive His innocence. Christ suffers your penalty; you receive His reward.

This is the foundation. This is secure. This never changes. Your status before God is settled, not by your righteousness, but by His righteousness credited to you.

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Imparted righteousness is the progressive conformity to Christ's character through the Spirit's work. This is sanctification. Day by day, choice by choice, moment by moment, you're being made actually righteous—not just declared righteous but transformed into righteousness.

Romans 8:29 says God predestined you "to become conformed to the image of His Son." This is imparted righteousness—the actual, internal, real transformation of your character to match Christ's character.

Both are essential. Both are the work of God. Both are received through faith.

You're not working to achieve the righteousness that justifies you—that's been given in Christ. And you're not working to achieve the righteousness that sanctifies you—that's being worked in you by the Spirit. From start to finish, it's God's righteousness, not yours.

The Revealing Process

But here's where it gets really interesting. Paul says this righteousness is "revealed." Present tense. Continuous action. The righteousness of God is being revealed, right now, progressively, from faith to faith.

What does this mean?

It means that as your faith grows, more of God's righteousness becomes visible in your life. Not because you're generating it, but because you're revealing what's already there. You're unveiling what was hidden. You're manifesting what was always true in Christ but not yet fully expressed through you.

It's like developing a photograph (for those who remember film). The image is already captured on the negative. It's already there, complete and perfect. But it's invisible until you put it through the developing process. As the chemicals do their work, the image gradually appears—first faint, then clearer, then fully revealed.

You are the photograph. Christ is the image. The Spirit is the developer. And faith is your cooperation with the process.

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The righteousness is already yours in Christ. But it's being revealed, from faith to faith, as you trust more deeply, depend more fully, surrender more completely.

Living From, Not For

This completely transforms how you approach the Christian life. You're not living *for* righteousness, trying to achieve it through performance. You're living *from* righteousness, expressing what's already been given.

You're not trying to become acceptable to God. You're living from the acceptance already secured in Christ.

You're not trying to earn God's favor. You're responding to favor already granted.

You're not trying to prove yourself righteous. You're revealing the righteousness already imputed and being imparted.

This is freedom. This is rest. This is the power of the gospel.

When you live for righteousness, you're in bondage—constantly striving, never arriving, always anxious about whether you've done enough. But when you live from righteousness, you're in freedom—resting in what Christ has done, cooperating with what the Spirit is doing, confident in what God will complete.

Martin Luther, after his conversion from works-righteousness to faith-righteousness, wrote: "This is the highest art: to be quiet, to be at rest from our works. To be still and to let God work in us; this is beyond all understanding. When I have come to understand this, then I know the mystery, and then I have life."

The Power Dimension

Finally, we need to address the nature of the power Paul is talking about. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation."

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The Greek word Paul uses for "power" is *dunamis*. We get our word "dynamite" from it. This isn't gentle, passive, weak power. This is explosive, transformative, world-altering power.

Dynamite: Explosive Transformation

When dynamite goes off, it doesn't leave things unchanged. It breaks through rock. It demolishes structures. It clears paths through impossible obstacles. It's violent, sudden, irresistible force.

This is the power of the gospel.

It's not a helpful suggestion. It's not a good idea. It's not positive thinking or self-help wisdom dressed in religious language. It's explosive, transformative power that breaks the chains of sin, demolishes the strongholds of darkness, and clears a path through the impossible barrier between humanity and God.

When the gospel enters a life, things change. Not might change. Not could change if you work really hard. Things change. Radically. Fundamentally. Irreversibly.

2 Corinthians 5:17 declares: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

New creature. Not improved creature. Not reformed creature. New. The old passed away. It's gone. Done. Finished. New things have come. They're here. Present. Real.

This is *dunamis* power at work.

The Same Power That Raised Christ

But Paul goes even further. He wants the Ephesians (and us) to understand the magnitude of the power at work in believers.

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Ephesians 1:19-20 is one long, breathless sentence describing this power: "and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

Let's break down what Paul is piling up here:

- Power (dunamis)
- Working (energeia—where we get "energy")
- Strength (kratos—where we get "kratocracy," rule by power)
- Might (ischus—inherent strength)

He's using every Greek word for power he can think of, stacking them on top of each other, trying to convey something almost beyond words: the power at work in you is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Let that sink in.

The greatest display of power in human history—the defeat of death itself, the breaking of the grave's hold, the triumph over humanity's ultimate enemy—that same power is now at work in you. Right now. This moment. Every day.

Power for What?

But what's this power for? What does it accomplish?

Paul is clear: it's "for salvation." But remember, salvation isn't just a past event. It's past, present, and future. It's comprehensive deliverance from sin's penalty, power, and presence.

The power of the gospel:

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- Delivered you from sin's penalty (justification—past)
- Is delivering you from sin's power (sanctification—present)
- Will deliver you from sin's presence (glorification—future)

Right now, in the present tense, the power of the gospel is working to transform you from glory to glory, from faith to faith, conforming you to the image of Christ.

This power isn't passive. It's not waiting for you to activate it through your effort. It's actively at work, whether you feel it or not, whether you see it or not, whether you cooperate or resist.

Romans 8:11 promises: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

The same Spirit. The same power. Now dwelling in you. Giving life. Transforming. Sanctifying. Preparing you for glory.

Power Through Weakness

But here's the paradox: this power is often most evident in your weakness, not your strength.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 records Christ's words to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Paul responds: "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

This turns our natural thinking upside down. We think power manifests through strength, success, victory, dominance. But God's power manifests through weakness, failure, surrender, dependence.

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Why? Because when you're strong, you're tempted to take credit. When you're weak, only God gets the glory. When you succeed through your own ability, people admire you. When you succeed despite obvious weakness, people see God.

This is why God often works through broken vessels, why He chooses the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). Because when obvious weakness produces supernatural results, there's no question about the source of the power.

The gospel's power doesn't supplement your strength. It replaces it. It doesn't enhance your ability. It substitutes for your inability. It doesn't improve your righteousness. It provides righteousness you could never generate.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: "God's strength is made perfect in weakness. That is what God's people have always known. They have tried to do things in their own strength, and they have always failed. The Church of God has been truly vigorous and strong when she has realized that she was weak."

Living in Gospel Power

So what does all this mean for your daily life?

It means you wake up each morning and remind yourself: the gospel isn't just how I was saved; it's how I'm being saved. It's not just past tense; it's present continuous. It's not just for unbelievers; it's for me, today, right now.

It means when you fail, you don't despair. You return to the gospel. You remember that your righteousness isn't based on your performance. You preach to yourself the good news that Christ's righteousness covers you and the Spirit's power is transforming you.

It means when you succeed, you don't take credit. You remember that any good work is the fruit of the gospel's power, not your own effort. You give thanks for what God is doing rather than congratulating yourself for what you've accomplished.

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It means you live from faith to faith—each day trusting a little more deeply, depending a little more fully, surrendering a little more completely. Not perfectly. Not without struggle. But progressively, from one degree of faith to another.

It means you embrace your weakness rather than hiding it. You stop pretending you have it all together and start being honest about your need. Because it's in weakness that God's power is most clearly seen.

It means you stop trying to generate transformation through your own effort and start cooperating with the transformation the Spirit is already working in you. You position yourself in the flow of gospel power through Word, prayer, community, and obedience—not as the source of power but as the channel through which it flows.

And it means you live with confidence—not in yourself, but in the God who began a good work in you and will complete it. Not because you're strong enough to finish, but because He's faithful enough to finish what He started.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Not was. Is. Present tense. Active voice. Ongoing reality.

And this gospel reveals the righteousness of God from faith to faith—progressively, continuously, transforming you from glory to glory until the day when Christ is revealed and you are revealed with Him in fullness of glory.

This is the power that prepares you for His glory. Not your effort, but His power. Not your righteousness, but His righteousness. Not your strength, but His strength perfected in your weakness.

From faith to faith. From glory to glory. From beginning to completion. All by grace. All through faith. All to the glory of God.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." — Jude 24-25 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

PART TWO: THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

From Glory to Glory

CHAPTER 4

Unveiled Faces—The Mirror of Glory

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."— 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)

There's a kind of Christianity that's obsessed with mirrors.

Not the kind Paul is talking about here—the mirror that reflects Christ's glory. No, I'm talking about the mirrors we hold up to ourselves, constantly examining our progress, measuring our spiritual growth, analyzing our performance, scrutinizing every flaw and failure.

We spend our lives staring at ourselves, checking to see if we're transforming yet, anxiously monitoring whether we're becoming holy enough, righteous enough, Christlike enough. We're introspective to the point of paralysis, self-focused to the point of despair.

And we wonder why transformation feels so slow, so difficult, so elusive.

But Paul offers a radically different approach. He says transformation doesn't come from looking at yourself. It comes from looking at Christ. It doesn't come from introspective self-examination. It comes from outward-focused contemplation of glory. It doesn't come from measuring your progress. It comes from beholding His perfection.

This single verse—2 Corinthians 3:18—contains the entire secret of Christian transformation. But we've missed it because we've been looking in the wrong mirror.

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We've been staring at ourselves, trying to fix what we see, attempting to improve our reflection through sheer willpower and religious effort. Meanwhile, Paul is saying: stop looking at yourself. Look at Christ. And as you gaze at Him—really gaze, not just glance—you'll be transformed into His image without even trying.

This is the paradox of transformation: you become like what you behold. The more you focus on yourself, the more you stay the same. The more you focus on Christ, the more you change. Not through effort, but through exposure. Not through striving, but through seeing.

This is the mirror of glory. And it changes everything.

The Veil Removed

To understand what Paul means by "unveiled face," we need to back up and grasp the context he's building from. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is contrasting two covenants—the Old Covenant of law and the New Covenant of grace—and he uses Moses as his primary illustration.

Moses and the Fading Glory

Remember the story from Exodus 34. Moses had been on Mount Sinai with God, receiving the law. When he came down, his face was shining with reflected glory—so much so that the Israelites couldn't look at him directly. So Moses put a veil over his face.

But here's what Paul points out that we often miss: Moses wasn't just veiling his face to protect the people from the brightness. He was veiling his face to hide the fact that the glory was fading.

2 Corinthians 3:13 says Moses put on the veil "so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away."

The glory was temporary. Borrowed. Fading. And Moses knew it.

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This is the Old Covenant in a nutshell: external glory, temporary brightness, borrowed radiance that inevitably fades. You could stand in God's presence and reflect His glory for a moment, but you couldn't sustain it. It would fade as soon as you stepped away.

The law could reveal God's standard, but it couldn't provide God's power. It could show you what holiness looks like, but it couldn't make you holy. It could reflect glory temporarily, but it couldn't transform you permanently.

And so everyone—from Moses to the least Israelite—had to live with veils. Barriers. Separation. Distance from the very glory they desperately needed.

The Veil Over Hearts

But Paul takes this imagery further. He's not just talking about a physical veil over Moses' face. He's talking about a spiritual veil over people's hearts.

2 Corinthians 3:14-15 says: "But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart."

The veil represents spiritual blindness. An inability to see and understand spiritual truth. A barrier between you and the glory of God. A hardness that prevents revelation from penetrating.

And here's the sobering reality: this veil isn't just an Old Testament problem. It exists today. Whenever anyone tries to approach God through law rather than grace, through performance rather than faith, through their own righteousness rather than Christ's—the veil remains.

You can read Scripture with a veil over your heart. You can attend church, sing worship songs, pray prayers, do religious activities—all with a veil firmly in place. The veil doesn't prevent religious activity. It prevents spiritual transformation.

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People with veiled hearts can be theologically correct, morally upright, religiously active—and completely unchanged. Because the veil blocks the transformative glory that actually changes us from the inside out.

The Veil Removed in Christ

But then comes verse 16: "But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

Not when you try harder. Not when you study more. Not when you perform better. When you *turn to the Lord*. When you shift your focus from self to Savior. When you stop trying to generate your own righteousness and start receiving His.

The moment—the very moment—you turn to Christ, the veil is removed. Past tense. Completed action. Not gradually removed. Not partially removed. Removed. Gone. Done.

And then verse 17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Liberty. Freedom. The opposite of the veil's constraint. The Spirit doesn't just remove the veil—He brings freedom. Freedom from performance. Freedom from self-generated righteousness. Freedom from the crushing weight of trying to transform yourself through willpower.

This is the New Covenant promise: direct access to God with no veil, no barrier, no separation. Not because you've earned it, but because Christ has provided it. Not because you're worthy, but because He's made you worthy.

And this unveiled access changes everything about how transformation works.

Living Unveiled

So what does it mean to live with an unveiled face before God?

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It means you stop hiding. You stop pretending. You stop performing. You come before God exactly as you are—broken, flawed, struggling—with nothing to offer but your need.

This is terrifying for most of us. We want to clean up first. We want to get our act together before we approach God. We want to earn the right to come into His presence.

But that's veiled thinking. That's Old Covenant mentality. That's trying to approach God through your own righteousness rather than through Christ's.

Living unveiled means radical honesty before God. It means bringing your worst to Him, not your best. It means confessing your weakness, not hiding it. It means admitting your need rather than pretending self-sufficiency.

David modeled this in Psalm 51. After his sin with Bathsheba, after the murder of Uriah, after months of cover-up and denial—he finally came before God unveiled. No excuses. No justification. Just raw, honest confession: "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1).

And what happened? Did God reject him? Destroy him? Cast him away? No. God restored him. Renewed him. Transformed him.

Because God doesn't transform veiled faces trying to appear holy. He transforms unveiled faces admitting their need.

This is the first and most crucial step in transformation: remove the veil. Stop hiding. Stop pretending. Stop trying to approach God through anything other than Christ's finished work.

Come unveiled. Come honest. Come broken. Come as you are.

And watch what happens.

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Beholding as in a Mirror

Now Paul introduces the mechanism of transformation: beholding.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord..."

The Greek word translated "beholding" (*katoptrizō*) is fascinating. It literally means "to reflect like a mirror" or "to gaze intently." It's not a casual glance. It's not a quick peek. It's sustained, focused, contemplative gazing.

And what are we gazing at? Not ourselves. Not our progress. Not our failures. Not our performance. We're gazing at "the glory of the Lord."

The Transforming Power of Gaze

Here's a principle that runs throughout Scripture and psychology alike: you become like what you behold. You are shaped by what you focus on. You are transformed by what captures your attention.

The ancient philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote: "The soul is dyed by its thoughts." Christian thinkers have adapted this: "The soul is dyed by what it contemplates." You cannot spend sustained time focusing on something without being shaped by it.

This is why what you watch, what you read, what you listen to, what you meditate on—it all matters. Not because God is a cosmic policeman trying to keep you from having fun, but because these things shape you. They dye your soul. They form your character. They determine who you're becoming.

If you spend your time focused on criticism, you become critical. If you spend your time focused on anxiety, you become anxious. If you spend your time focused on self, you become self-absorbed. If you spend your time focused on success, you become driven.

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But if you spend your time focused on Christ—beholding His glory, contemplating His character, meditating on His work—you become like Him.

G.K. Beale, in his book *We Become What We Worship*, argues this convincingly: "What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or for restoration."

This is simultaneously terrifying and hopeful. Terrifying because it means your idols will eventually destroy you—you'll become like them in all their emptiness and futility. Hopeful because it means Christ will eventually transform you—you'll become like Him through simple, sustained contemplation.

The Mirror Metaphor

But notice Paul's specific language: "beholding as in a mirror." What does this mean?

In Paul's day, mirrors weren't like our modern mirrors. They were polished metal—bronze or silver—that gave a reflection, but not a perfect one. 1 Corinthians 13:12 talks about seeing "in a mirror dimly."

So when Paul says we behold Christ's glory "as in a mirror," he's saying two things:

First, we see a reflection, not the direct reality. We don't see Christ face-to-face yet (that comes in glorification). We see His glory reflected—in Scripture, in creation, in other believers, in the Spirit's internal witness. It's a genuine sight, but mediated, not immediate.

Second, we become reflectors ourselves. A mirror doesn't just see—it reflects. As we gaze at Christ's glory, we begin to reflect that same glory. We become mirrors ourselves, showing others what we've been beholding.

This is why Paul can say earlier in the chapter: "You are our letter...known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2). People read you. They see in you a reflection of what you've been beholding. If you've been beholding Christ, they'll see Christ reflected in you.

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What It Means to Behold Christ

But practically, what does it mean to behold Christ's glory? How do we do this?

Through Scripture. This is primary. The written Word reveals the living Word. You can't behold Christ without saturating yourself in the Bible. Not just reading it for information, but meditating on it for transformation. Not just studying what it says about Christ, but encountering Christ Himself through its pages.

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (John 5:39). The Scriptures are meant to lead you to Christ, to reveal His glory, to make Him known.

When you read about Christ's compassion, behold it. When you read about His mercy, contemplate it. When you read about His sacrifice, meditate on it. When you read about His resurrection, fix your gaze on it.

Through worship. Singing isn't just about making noise. Worship is focused contemplation of God's character through music, poetry, and communal expression. When you sing "Amazing Grace," you're not just performing a song—you're beholding grace, meditating on its magnitude, letting its reality sink deeper into your soul.

Through prayer. Not just asking for things, but communing with Christ. Sitting in His presence. Listening. Waiting. Contemplating who He is rather than just what He can do for you.

Through communion. The Lord's Supper is designed to focus your attention on Christ's sacrifice. "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). It's a sustained act of beholding—looking at the bread and wine and seeing Christ's body broken and blood shed for you.

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Through creation. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made." Creation reflects the Creator. When you see beauty, you're seeing a reflection of Christ's glory. When you witness power, you're seeing a reflection of His might.

All of these are mirrors—imperfect, incomplete, but real. And as you gaze through them at Christ's glory, something happens. Something you can't manufacture through effort. Something mysterious and miraculous.

You're transformed.

Being Transformed: Present Continuous Action

Now we come to the heart of Paul's revelation: "are being transformed."

This phrase in Greek is absolutely critical. The word is μεταμορφούμεθα (metamorphoumesta). You might recognize the root: metamorphosis. It's the word used to describe a caterpillar becoming a butterfly—not just change, but radical transformation. Not improvement, but complete reconstitution.

The Metamorphosis Principle

When a caterpillar enters the cocoon, something extraordinary happens. It doesn't just develop wings and antenna. It doesn't just improve or upgrade. It literally dissolves. Its body breaks down into something like genetic soup. And from that soup, a completely new creature emerges.

Butterfly DNA was in the caterpillar all along. But it was dormant, hidden, waiting. The metamorphosis doesn't add something new; it reveals and actualizes what was always there in potential.

This is what's happening to you spiritually. You're not being improved. You're being metamorphosed. Your old identity is dissolving. Your new identity in Christ is emerging. The DNA of Christ—His Spirit dwelling in you—is reshaping you from the inside out.

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And here's what's crucial: this is present continuous tense. Not "were transformed" (one-time past event). Not "will be transformed" (future hope only). "Are being transformed." Right now. This moment. Ongoing. Continuous. Active.

Whether you feel it or not. Whether you see it or not. Whether you're cooperating or resisting. If you're in Christ with an unveiled face beholding His glory, metamorphosis is happening.

Not Instant, But Continuous

We need to be honest about something: transformation isn't instant. We're not zapped into Christlikeness at conversion. We don't wake up one day suddenly perfected.

Too many Christians struggle with discouragement because they expected instant transformation and got gradual sanctification instead. They prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, made a commitment—and then wondered why they still struggled with the same sins, the same weaknesses, the same patterns.

But Paul is clear: it's a continuous process. It's ongoing. It's progressive. From glory to glory means from one degree to the next, step by step, layer by layer.

This should simultaneously relieve pressure and increase hope.

Relieve pressure because you're not supposed to be perfect yet. You're not supposed to have it all figured out. You're in process. You're under construction. You're a caterpillar in the cocoon, and dissolution always precedes emergence.

Increase hope because the process is guaranteed. God doesn't start projects He doesn't finish. The One who began the good work will complete it (Philippians 1:6). The metamorphosis will succeed.

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The Renewing of the Mind

Romans 12:2 gives us another angle on this transformation: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Notice: the same word. Metamorphosis. Transformation. But here Paul adds a mechanism: "the renewing of your mind."

Your mind is where transformation becomes visible. Not primarily in your circumstances (though those may change). Not primarily in your external behavior (though that will shift). Primarily in your mind—how you think, what you think about, the patterns of thought that shape your perception and direct your actions.

This is why beholding Christ is so crucial. You can't renew your mind by not thinking. You renew your mind by thinking about the right things. By fixing your mind on Christ. By meditating on His Word. By contemplating His character.

Philippians 4:8 gives us the prescription: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

Dwell on them. Fix your mind on them. Behold them. And as you do, your mind is renewed. Your thought patterns shift. Your automatic responses change. Your desires are transformed.

And here's the beautiful part: you don't have to force behavioral change. You don't have to white-knuckle your way to holiness. You don't have to try really hard not to sin.

When your mind is renewed—when you're truly beholding Christ's glory and being transformed—the behaviors follow naturally. Not perfectly. Not without struggle. But progressively, from glory to glory.

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You stop certain sins not because you've developed strong enough willpower, but because you've developed a deeper love for Christ. You develop new habits not because you've mastered self-discipline, but because the Spirit is producing His fruit in you naturally.

This is the difference between behavior modification and true transformation. Behavior modification can produce external conformity for a while, but it's exhausting and eventually fails. True transformation produces internal change that naturally expresses itself in external behavior—and it's sustainable because it's Spirit-powered, not self-powered.

Passive Voice: Something Done TO You

Here's another crucial grammatical detail in 2 Corinthians 3:18. The verb "being transformed" is passive voice. This means you're not the one doing the transforming. You're the one being transformed. Something—Someone—is acting upon you.

The Spirit is doing the work. Christ is forming His image in you. God is completing what He started.

Your role isn't to transform yourself. Your role is to position yourself where transformation happens. To remove the veil. To keep your face turned toward Christ. To behold His glory. To cooperate with what the Spirit is already doing rather than trying to generate transformation through self-effort.

Think of it like a plant. The plant doesn't make itself grow. It doesn't try really hard to produce leaves and flowers. It simply positions itself toward the sun, sends its roots deep into the soil, and allows the natural processes of life to work.

You're like that plant. Position yourself in the light of Christ's glory. Send your roots deep into the soil of His Word. And let the Spirit do what only He can do—transform you from the inside out.

From Glory to Glory

Finally, we come to this beautiful phrase: "from glory to glory."

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Not from shame to glory. Not from failure to glory. Not from darkness to glory. From glory to glory.

You Already Have Glory

This is startling. Paul assumes you already possess glory. You're not starting from zero. You're not beginning in complete spiritual bankruptcy. You have glory—the glory of being made in God's image, the glory of being indwelt by His Spirit, the glory of being called His child.

Genesis 1:27 establishes this: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him." That image was marred by sin, but never destroyed. You still bear the imago Dei—the image of God. That's glory.

Romans 8:30 declares that those God justified, He also "glorified." Past tense. Already done. You're already glorified in God's eternal perspective.

Colossians 3:3 says, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Your life is hidden with Christ. That's glory—it's just not fully visible yet.

So you're not moving from nothing to something. You're moving from one degree of glory to a greater degree. From one level of reflecting Christ to a deeper level. From one stage of image-bearing to a more complete stage.

Progressive Sanctification

This is what theologians call progressive sanctification—the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ. It's progressive, not instantaneous. It's a journey, not a destination you arrive at in this life.

J.I. Packer wrote: "Sanctification has a double aspect. Its positive side is growing in grace; its negative side is mortification."

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Growing in grace: actively pursuing Christ, developing spiritual disciplines, cultivating love, increasing in knowledge and wisdom.

Mortification: putting to death sin, crucifying the flesh, saying no to ungodliness, dying daily to self.

Both are necessary. Both are Spirit-enabled. Both are part of the glory-to-glory progression.

But notice the order Paul emphasizes: it's primarily positive. From glory to glory. Yes, there's a negative dimension—sin must be put to death. But the primary direction is positive—glory increasing, Christ being formed, the image being restored.

Too many Christians focus almost exclusively on the negative. They're obsessed with what they shouldn't do, constantly fighting against sin, always focused on their failures and struggles. And they're exhausted and discouraged because that's not the primary focus Scripture gives us.

Scripture says: behold Christ. Fix your eyes on Him. Contemplate His glory. And as you do—almost as a side effect—sin loses its power. Not because you tried so hard to defeat it, but because something better captured your attention.

The Dawn Metaphor

Proverbs 4:18 gives us another beautiful image of this progression: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day."

Think about watching the sunrise. First there's darkness. Then the faintest hint of light on the horizon. Then more light. Then color begins to appear. Then the sun breaks the horizon. Then more light, brighter and brighter. Then full day.

At no point during the sunrise would you say, "This isn't working. It's still not fully light, so the sun must not be rising." You see the progression. You recognize that it's getting brighter, even if it's not yet full day.

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This is your sanctification. This is your glory-to-glory progression. It's getting brighter. It's becoming more visible. It's increasing in intensity.

But it's not full day yet. And that's okay. That's actually by design. The full day comes at glorification, when Christ returns, when we see Him face to face and are fully transformed into His likeness.

Until then, we're in the dawn stage. The light is increasing. The glory is growing. The transformation is happening. But we haven't arrived. We're still in process. Still under construction. Still being metamorphosed from one degree of glory to the next.

The Tension of Already-But-Not-Yet

This creates a tension we must learn to live with. We already possess glory, but we're still becoming glorious. We're already righteous in Christ, but we're still being made righteous practically. We're already holy positionally, but we're still being sanctified progressively.

This tension is uncomfortable. We want to either rest in positional truth and ignore practical growth, or focus on practical growth and forget positional truth.

But Scripture holds both. You are already glorious—rest in that. And you are becoming more glorious—grow in that.

You are already righteous in Christ—believe that. And you are being transformed into righteousness—cooperate with that.

You are already holy before God—receive that. And you are being sanctified by the Spirit—yield to that.

This is the glory-to-glory journey. Possessing and pursuing. Resting and striving. Being and becoming.

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Living From Glory to Glory

So how do we actually live this out? How do we position ourselves for this glory-to-glory transformation?

First, remove the veil. Stop hiding from God. Stop pretending. Stop trying to approach Him through anything other than Christ's finished work. Come as you are, unveiled, honest, desperate for His transforming work.

Second, behold Christ. Make gazing at His glory the central practice of your life. Through Scripture. Through worship. Through prayer. Through communion. Through creation. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Third, trust the process. You're being transformed. Right now. Whether you feel it or not. Whether you see immediate results or not. The Spirit is at work. The metamorphosis is happening. Trust that God who began the work will complete it.

Fourth, focus on glory, not shame. When you fail, don't wallow in condemnation. Remember you're moving from glory to glory, not from shame to glory. You already possess the glory of being in Christ. Now you're growing in expressing that glory more fully.

Fifth, cultivate patience. Transformation is progressive, not instantaneous. The sun doesn't rise in one sudden burst. Dawn comes gradually, steadily, inevitably. Be patient with the process. Be patient with yourself. Be patient with God's timing.

Sixth, stay unveiled before community. You can't do this alone. You need others who know your struggles and speak truth to you. You need fellow travelers on the glory-to-glory journey who can encourage you, pray for you, hold you accountable, and remind you of whose image you're being transformed into.

Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish minister and theologian, preached a famous sermon titled "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." His thesis: you don't defeat sin primarily by fighting against it directly, but by being captivated by something better—by Christ's glory.

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When Christ's glory captures your gaze, when His love captivates your heart, when His beauty becomes your primary focus—sin loses its appeal almost without effort. Not because you tried so hard to resist, but because something infinitely better captured your attention.

This is the secret of transformation. This is the power of the unveiled face beholding glory. This is how you move from glory to glory.

Not by looking at yourself and trying to fix what you see. But by looking at Christ and being transformed by what—by whom—you behold.

Remove the veil. Behold His glory. Trust the Spirit's work. And watch what happens as you're transformed, progressively, continuously, certainly, from one degree of glory to the next, until the day when you see Him face to face and are fully conformed to His image.

The sun is rising. The glory is increasing. The transformation is happening.

Keep your face turned toward the Light.

"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." — 2 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB)

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CHAPTER 5

The Refiner's Fire—Preparation Through Trials

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."—1

Peter 1:6-7 (NASB)

Let's be honest about something most Christian books won't admit: sometimes following Jesus makes your life harder, not easier.

I know that's not what the prosperity preachers promise. I know that's not what the motivational speakers guarantee. I know that's not the Christianity marketed on Sunday morning television. But it's the Christianity taught in Scripture.

Jesus never promised comfort. He promised a cross. He never guaranteed ease. He guaranteed tribulation. He never said following Him would solve all your problems. He said it would create some new ones—though of infinitely greater value than anything you'd lose.

Peter, writing to believers scattered by persecution, doesn't sugarcoat this reality. He doesn't pretend that faith protects you from suffering. Instead, he does something more radical: he tells them to rejoice in their trials. Not despite them. Not after them. In them.

And he gives a reason that sounds almost insane to our comfort-seeking ears: these trials—these painful, difficult, unwanted trials—are necessary. They serve a purpose. They accomplish something that nothing else can accomplish. They prepare you for glory in ways that ease and comfort never could.

This is the refiner's fire. And while nobody volunteers for it, everyone who emerges from it looks back and sees God's fingerprints all over the process.

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The question isn't whether you'll face trials. Peter says "if necessary"—and for most of us, it's necessary. The question is whether you'll understand what God is doing through them and cooperate with the process, or whether you'll resist, resent, and waste the pain.

The Necessity of Trials

Peter uses a curious phrase: "if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."

If necessary. This implies that trials aren't arbitrary. They're not random chaos. They're not divine sadism. They're necessary—serving a purpose, accomplishing an objective, achieving something specific that couldn't be achieved any other way.

But necessary for what?

The Refining Process

Malachi 3:2-3 gives us the metaphor: "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness."

The refiner's fire isn't meant to destroy. It's meant to purify. To remove impurities. To burn away dross. To reveal what's authentic and valuable beneath the corruption.

I once watched a goldsmith work. He placed raw ore into a crucible and subjected it to intense heat. As the temperature rose, impurities began to surface—slag, dross, contamination. He carefully skimmed off each layer of corruption, then returned the gold to the fire. Again and again. Heat, remove impurities, heat, remove impurities.

"How do you know when it's done?" I asked.

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He smiled. "When I can see my reflection clearly in the gold."

God is the Master Refiner. And He's looking for His reflection in you. But that reflection is obscured by layers of corruption—sin, self-reliance, false identities, worldly values, survival mechanisms that once protected you but now imprison you.

The fire doesn't create impurities. It reveals them. It brings them to the surface where they can be removed. The heat isn't punishment. It's purification. The pain isn't meaningless. It's purposeful.

And God doesn't step away during the process. The passage says, "He will sit as a smelter." He doesn't delegate this task. He doesn't set it and forget it. He sits. He watches. He monitors the temperature carefully. He knows exactly how much heat you can bear, and He never lets it exceed what's necessary for purification.

James on Trials

James 1:2-4 takes this even further: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Notice what James doesn't say. He doesn't say "if you encounter trials." He says "when you encounter various trials." It's not a possibility. It's a certainty. Not if, but when.

And notice what he does say: "Consider it all joy." Not pretend to be happy. Not fake enthusiasm. Not deny the pain. *Consider*—think deeply about, reflect on, understand the purpose of—these trials with joy.

Why? Because you know what they're producing. You understand the purpose. You see the end result.

"The testing of your faith produces endurance." The Greek word for "testing" (dokimion) refers to the proving or testing of metal through fire. It's the same concept as the refiner's fire—not meant to destroy, but to prove, to purify, to authenticate.

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Your faith is being tested. Not to see if God believes in you, but to reveal whether your faith is authentic. Not all that glitters is gold. Not all that looks like faith is genuine faith. The fire reveals the difference.

And this testing produces endurance (*hypomonē*)—not passive resignation, but active perseverance. The ability to remain under pressure without collapsing. The strength to keep going when everything in you wants to quit.

But James doesn't stop there. Endurance has a "perfect result"—it makes you "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Not sinless perfection, but mature completeness. Fully developed. Lacking nothing necessary for your calling and purpose.

The trials aren't random. They're strategic. They're designed to produce something in you that nothing else can produce. And while you'd never choose them, you'll eventually be grateful for what they produced.

The "If Necessary" Qualifier

But back to Peter's phrase: "if necessary." This is both sobering and comforting.

Sobering because it means not everyone needs the same trials. God custom-designs your refining process. The heat He allows in your life is specific to the impurities He's removing from you. Your trials will look different from someone else's trials because your dross is different from their dross.

You can't compare your fire to someone else's fire. You can't judge whether someone else's faith is strong or weak based on the intensity of their trials. God knows exactly what each person needs, and He apportions trials accordingly.

But it's also comforting because it means trials aren't universal or constant. They're "if necessary" and "for a little while." God doesn't subject you to more heat than necessary. He doesn't keep you in the fire longer than required. The moment the refining is complete—the moment He can see His reflection clearly—He removes you from the crucible.

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The fire is necessary, but it's not forever. The pain is purposeful, but it's not permanent. The trial is strategic, but it's not endless.

Refined for Glory

So what's the purpose of this refining? What's God after?

Peter tells us: "so that the proof of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The goal isn't just to make you a better person. The goal isn't just to build character (though that happens). The goal is glory—specifically, glory revealed at Christ's return.

Proving Authentic Faith

The word "proof" (dokimion again) carries the idea of what's left after testing—the pure metal remaining after the dross has been burned away. It's the genuine article, proven authentic by fire.

God isn't testing your faith because He's unsure whether it's real. He's testing your faith to prove to you, to others, and ultimately to a watching universe that it's genuine.

Job 23:10 captures this confidence: "But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Job is in the middle of devastating loss—his wealth gone, his children dead, his health destroyed, his wife telling him to curse God and die, his friends accusing him of hidden sin. Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong.

But Job maintains confidence: "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Not if. Not maybe. Not hopefully. When. And not as slag. As gold. Purified. Proven. Authentic.

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This is what trials do. They reveal what's really there. They expose what you truly believe when the props are removed. They show what you're actually trusting in when everything else is stripped away.

You might think you're trusting in God when things are going well. But trials reveal whether you're trusting in God or trusting in God's gifts. Whether you're worshiping the Giver or the blessings. Whether your faith is rooted in Christ or in circumstances.

The fire doesn't create authentic faith. It reveals it. And sometimes, the fire reveals that what you thought was faith was actually presumption, or wishful thinking, or religious activity without genuine heart transformation.

And that revelation—as painful as it is—is a gift. Because you can't repent of what you don't recognize. You can't address what you don't admit. The fire that reveals false faith creates opportunity for genuine faith to emerge.

More Precious Than Gold

Peter says this proven faith is "more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire."

Think about that comparison. Gold is extremely valuable. It's been the standard of wealth throughout human history. It's tested by fire to prove its purity. But it's perishable—it can be lost, stolen, destroyed.

Your faith—proven authentic through trials—is more valuable than gold. It's imperishable. It can't be lost, stolen, or destroyed. No economic collapse can devalue it. No thief can take it. No disaster can eliminate it.

And this proven faith will "result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Notice the timing: "at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Not now. Not in this life. When Christ returns. When everything hidden is revealed. When all accounts are settled and all purposes are made clear.

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The praise, glory, and honor aren't primarily for you—though you'll share in it. They're primarily for Christ. Your proven faith brings praise to Jesus. Your perseverance through trials glorifies Him. Your endurance honors His name.

This is what God is after. Not just your comfort. Not just your happiness. Your transformation into someone whose life brings praise, glory, and honor to Christ when He's revealed.

And the fire—as painful as it is—is necessary to produce that result.

The Assayer's Verdict

In ancient times, an assayer was someone who tested metals to determine their purity and value. His verdict mattered—it determined whether metal was fit for currency, jewelry, or construction.

God is the ultimate Assayer. And trials are His testing process. But here's what's remarkable: when you emerge from the fire, His verdict is already determined. You're not hoping to pass. You're guaranteed to pass because Christ has already passed on your behalf.

The testing isn't to see if you'll make it. The testing is to prove you will make it. To demonstrate that the faith He's given you is genuine, authentic, and persevering.

This should transform how you view trials. They're not evidence that God has abandoned you. They're evidence that God is refining you. They're not proof that your faith is failing. They're the process by which your faith is being proven.

Suffering That Produces Glory

Now we come to one of the most mysterious and profound connections in Scripture: the link between present suffering and future glory.

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Romans 8:17 states it plainly: "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

If indeed we suffer with Him. This isn't a peripheral possibility. It's a central expectation. Suffering with Christ is the pathway to being glorified with Christ.

The Connection Between Suffering and Glory

Why this connection? Why can't we skip the suffering and go straight to glory?

Because glory isn't just a reward you receive. It's a character you develop. And that character is forged through suffering in ways it cannot be forged through ease.

Think about Jesus Himself. Hebrews 5:8 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Jesus—perfect, sinless Jesus—learned something through suffering that He apparently couldn't learn any other way.

If the Son of God needed to suffer, why would we expect to skip it?

Augustine captured this reality: "God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering."

Let that sink in. Jesus was sinless. But He wasn't suffering-less. In fact, His sinlessness didn't exempt Him from suffering—it intensified it. He felt the full weight of pain without the numbing effects of sin to dull His senses.

And if Christ's path to glory ran through suffering, why would ours be different?

The Weight Comparison

Paul makes an audacious claim in 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

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Read that again. Paul calls his afflictions "momentary" and "light." This is the same Paul who was beaten with rods, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, imprisoned, hungry, cold, persecuted, and abandoned. If anyone had a right to call his sufferings heavy and prolonged, it was Paul.

But he doesn't. He calls them momentary and light. Why?

Because he's comparing them to "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Compared to the glory that's coming, present sufferings are lightweight and brief. The scales don't even balance. It's not even close.

But notice the verb: "is producing." Present tense. Active voice. Continuous action. Your present suffering isn't just something you endure until glory arrives. Your present suffering is actively producing future glory. It's the mechanism. It's the means. It's the process by which glory is created.

The suffering isn't incidental to glory. It's instrumental to glory. It's not just the path you walk to get to glory. It's the forge in which glory is fashioned.

The Mathematics of Glory

Try to picture the comparison Paul is making. On one side of the scale: your worst suffering. Your deepest pain. Your most prolonged trial. Your greatest loss. Everything difficult, everything painful, everything that's made you want to quit—all of it piled together on one side of the scale.

On the other side: eternal weight of glory.

And Paul says the glory side outweighs the suffering side "far beyond all comparison." It's not even in the same category. It's not a close call. It's not a narrow victory. It's overwhelming, incomprehensible superiority.

The Greek phrase "far beyond all comparison" (*kath' hyperbolēn eis hyperbolēn*) literally means "according to excess unto excess" or "exceeding exceedingly." Paul is piling up words trying to express something almost inexpressible—the glory is so far beyond the suffering that you can't even compare them.

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And here's the staggering part: Paul says your "momentary, light affliction" is producing this glory. There's a direct, causal relationship. The suffering is the means by which the glory is created. Not punishment preceding reward. Not difficulty unrelated to blessing. But suffering that produces—generates, creates, brings about—glory.

Sharing Christ's Sufferings

But there's another dimension here. Paul doesn't talk about random suffering. He talks about suffering "with Him" (Romans 8:17). Peter talks about sharing "the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 4:13).

What does this mean?

It means that when you suffer as a Christian—when you face trials because of your faith, when you experience persecution for righteousness' sake, when you endure hardship in the course of obedience—you're participating in Christ's own sufferings.

Not that you're adding to His redemptive work. That's complete. Finished. "It is finished" means exactly that. But you're sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings (Philippians 3:10). You're experiencing what He experienced. You're walking where He walked. You're drinking from the cup He drank from.

And there's something transformative about suffering with Christ that doesn't happen when you suffer apart from Him. When you suffer alone, it can embitter you. But when you suffer with Christ—consciously aware of His presence, deliberately embracing it as fellowship with Him—it sanctifies you.

Colossians 1:24 says something mysterious: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

What is lacking in Christ's afflictions? Nothing redemptive. But something experiential. Christ's body—the church—is still being formed. And as we suffer, we share in His sufferings, and somehow our suffering serves the body, builds the church, advances the kingdom.

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Your suffering isn't meaningless. It's not wasted. It's producing glory—in you, through you, for the church, and ultimately for Christ Himself.

The Character Formation Process

Now Paul gives us the mechanics of how suffering produces glory. It's not mysterious magic. It's a definable process.

Romans 5:3-5 lays it out: "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Notice the chain: tribulation → perseverance → proven character → hope.

Tribulation Produces Perseverance

The Greek word for "brings about" (katergazomai) means to work out fully, to accomplish, to produce as a result. Tribulation doesn't just allow perseverance; it actively produces it.

How? Because you can't develop perseverance without something to persevere through. You can't build endurance without resistance. You can't develop strength without load.

Perseverance (hypomonē) literally means "remaining under." It's the ability to stay under pressure without collapsing. To keep going when everything in you wants to quit. To maintain faithfulness when circumstances scream that God has abandoned you.

And you can't develop this in ease. You can't learn to remain under pressure when there's no pressure. You can't develop the ability to endure when everything is comfortable.

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The tribulation is the weight that builds the muscle. The trial is the resistance that develops the strength. The pressure is what produces the capacity to withstand pressure.

This is why removing all difficulty from someone's life—even when motivated by love—can actually harm them. You're not helping them develop the strength they'll need for harder battles ahead. You're leaving them weak and unprepared.

God doesn't remove every difficulty because He's building perseverance in you. He's developing muscles you'll need for the journey ahead. He's creating capacity for greater weight, greater responsibility, greater glory.

Perseverance Produces Proven Character

The word "proven character" (*dokimē*) is the same root we saw earlier—tested, proven, approved. It's character that's been through the fire and proven authentic.

There's untested character—good intentions, noble aspirations, sincere beliefs. Then there's proven character—convictions that have been tested under fire and remained standing.

Perseverance reveals what kind of character you have. When pressure is applied and you don't collapse, when trials come and you don't abandon faith, when suffering hits and you don't curse God—your character is being proven.

This is why people who've been through hell and remained faithful have a depth that comfortable Christianity never produces. They have a rootedness, a stability, a unshakeable confidence that comes only from proven character.

You can't fake this. You can't shortcut it. You can't skip the testing and claim the proven character. The only way to proven character is through perseverance. And the only way to perseverance is through tribulation.

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Proven Character Produces Hope

This might seem counterintuitive. How does suffering produce hope? Doesn't suffering usually crush hope?

It depends on what you're hoping in.

If you're hoping in circumstances, suffering will destroy that hope. If you're hoping in health, prosperity, comfort, or ease—suffering will shatter those hopes.

But if you're hoping in God—if your hope is anchored in His character, His promises, His faithfulness—then suffering actually strengthens that hope. Because as you walk through trials and see God sustain you, as you endure difficulty and experience His presence, as you face darkness and witness His light—your hope in Him deepens.

Every trial you survive with faith intact is evidence that God is trustworthy. Every difficulty you endure with His strength is proof that His grace is sufficient. Every dark valley you walk through with His presence is confirmation that He'll never leave you nor forsake you.

Proven character produces hope because proven character has evidence. You're not hoping in a theory. You're hoping in a God you've personally experienced as faithful through fire.

Hope That Does Not Disappoint

But Paul doesn't stop there. He adds: "and hope does not disappoint."

The Greek word (*kataischynō*) means to put to shame, to disappoint, to fail. This hope won't fail you. It won't leave you embarrassed for trusting. It won't prove to be misplaced confidence.

Why? "Because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

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The foundation of this unshakeable hope isn't your strength, your perseverance, or even your proven character. The foundation is God's love poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit.

This love is:

- Already poured out (past tense—it's already there)
- Interior (within our hearts—not external circumstances)
- Abundant (poured out—lavished, not measured out sparingly)
- Spiritual (through the Holy Spirit—it's supernatural, not natural)

This is what sustains you through tribulation. This is what enables perseverance. This is what produces proven character. This is what grounds unshakeable hope.

Not your determination. Not your willpower. Not your spiritual disciplines. God's love, poured into your heart by His Spirit, creating capacity to endure what would otherwise be unendurable.

Living Through the Fire

So how do we actually live through trials with this perspective? How do we move from theoretical understanding to practical experience?

First, expect trials. Stop being surprised when they come. Stop thinking something strange has happened to you (1 Peter 4:12). Trials are normal. Expected. Part of the package. Jesus promised them. The apostles predicted them. History confirms them.

Second, look for the purpose. Don't waste your pain by not learning from it. Ask God what He's refining. What impurity is He revealing? What false foundation is He exposing? What character is He building? The trial is purposeful—seek to understand the purpose.

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Third, remember the timeline. "For a little while." "Momentary." "Light." Compared to eternity, this is brief. Compared to the glory that's coming, this is lightweight. Keep the eternal perspective. Don't make temporal suffering feel permanent by losing sight of the future.

Fourth, trust the Refiner. He's sitting. He's watching. He's monitoring the temperature. He knows exactly how much heat you can bear, and He won't exceed it (1 Corinthians 10:13). The fire feels out of control to you, but it's completely under His control.

Fifth, share the suffering. Don't walk through trials alone. Let others into your pain. Be honest about your struggles. Allow the body of Christ to bear your burdens with you (Galatians 6:2). Isolation intensifies suffering. Community contextualizes it and makes it bearable.

Sixth, fix your eyes on Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 says to fix our eyes on Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." Jesus endured suffering by focusing on the joy ahead. Do the same. Keep your eyes on the glory that's coming, not just the pain that's present.

Seventh, remember His presence. You're not suffering alone. Isaiah 43:2 promises: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you." He doesn't promise to remove the fire. He promises to be with you in it.

The refiner's fire is real. The heat is intense. The pain is legitimate. Don't let anyone minimize your suffering or tell you to just have more faith and it will stop.

But the fire is purposeful. The Refiner is present. The process is temporary. And the result—proven faith, mature character, unshakeable hope, and eternal glory—is worth every moment in the flames.

Job didn't understand why he was suffering. He questioned. He argued. He demanded answers. But he never abandoned faith. And when he emerged from his trial, he said: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5).

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The fire gave him something ease never could: direct experience of God's presence in the midst of pain. Not answers, but encounter. Not explanation, but intimacy.

This is what the refiner's fire produces. Not just proven faith, but deeper knowledge of the Refiner Himself. Not just character, but Christ-likeness. Not just endurance, but intimate acquaintance with the One who endures with you.

And when He can see His reflection clearly in the gold—when His image shines through without obstruction—He removes you from the fire.

Until then, trust the process. Endure the heat. Keep your eyes on the Refiner. And remember: you're being prepared for glory that will make every moment in the fire seem like a momentary, light affliction by comparison.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."—

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 6

Crucified with Christ—Death Before Glory

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."—

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

Here's the scandal nobody tells you when they're recruiting you for Christianity: following Jesus requires dying.

Not metaphorically dying. Not "dying to your old dreams" in some poetic sense. Actually dying. Daily. Repeatedly. Ruthlessly.

Dying to self. Dying to pride. Dying to control. Dying to your right to self-protection, self-promotion, self-preservation. Dying to the carefully constructed identity you've spent your whole life building. Dying to the survival mechanisms that once protected you but now imprison you.

This is what Paul means when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ." Not "I've made some lifestyle adjustments." Not "I've committed to spiritual disciplines." Not "I've improved my behavior." Crucified. Executed. Put to death.

And here's the part that makes this even harder: you have to participate in your own execution. You have to pick up your cross daily. You have to volunteer for the death that everything in you screams to avoid.

The prosperity gospel will never tell you this. The motivational preachers won't mention it. The seeker-friendly church will soft-pedal it or ignore it entirely. Because death doesn't sell. Death doesn't fill auditoriums. Death doesn't grow megachurches.

But it does produce glory. In fact, it's the only pathway to glory. Not around death. Not instead of death. Through death. Always through death.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Jesus Himself established this principle: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Death first. Fruit later. No death, no fruit. It's that simple. It's that brutal. It's that unavoidable.

This is the cross before the crown. The crucifixion before the resurrection. The tomb before the triumph. And there's no shortcut. No hack. No way to skip the dying part and jump straight to the glory part.

Glory comes through death. Always. Without exception. For Jesus. For Paul. For every saint throughout history. And for you.

The Paradox of Glory Through Death

Let's start with the most counterintuitive principle in all of Christianity: life comes through death, glory comes through suffering, exaltation comes through humiliation, and power comes through weakness.

This inverts everything the world teaches. Everything your natural instincts scream. Everything your survival mechanisms are wired to pursue.

The world says: protect yourself. Christianity says: die to yourself. The world says: promote yourself. Christianity says: humble yourself. The world says: preserve your life. Christianity says: lose your life. The world says: climb the ladder. Christianity says: descend into servanthood.

The Grain of Wheat

Jesus established this paradox in John 12:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Picture a grain of wheat. It's complete in itself—intact, protected by its husk, containing all the genetic information needed to produce an entire plant. But as long as it remains in that protected state, it remains alone. One grain. Nothing more.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

For that grain to fulfill its purpose—to produce a harvest, to multiply itself, to become something greater than what it currently is—it must die. It must fall into the ground. It must let the protective husk break down. It must allow itself to be buried in darkness. It must surrender its current form entirely.

And then—only then—can new life emerge. The death releases life that was dormant. The breaking down creates the possibility of building up. The burial in darkness becomes the prerequisite for growth toward light.

This is what Jesus is saying about Himself—and about you. As long as you cling to your current identity, your self-constructed persona, your carefully protected autonomy—you remain alone. One grain. Limited. Contained. Unable to fulfill your purpose.

But when you die—when you allow that protective husk to be broken, when you let yourself be buried in the darkness of self-death, when you surrender control of your life—fruit becomes possible. Multiplication happens. Purpose is fulfilled. Glory emerges.

Not despite the death. Through the death. Because of the death.

Jesus's Own Example

Jesus wasn't speaking theoretically. He was describing His own imminent death. Within days of speaking these words, He would be arrested, tried, beaten, crucified, buried. He would experience literal death—physical, agonizing, complete.

And through that death, salvation would come to the world. The grain of wheat would fall into the ground and die. And from that death, a harvest of souls would emerge—billions of redeemed people across two millennia and counting.

If Jesus—the sinless Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the One who had every right to avoid suffering—chose to go through death to reach glory, what makes us think we can skip it?

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Hebrews 2:10 tells us it was "fitting" that God would "perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings." Fitting. Appropriate. Necessary. Even for Jesus, perfection (in the sense of completion, fulfillment of purpose) came through suffering and death.

And Hebrews 5:8 adds: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Jesus—perfect, sinless Jesus—learned something through suffering that He apparently couldn't learn any other way.

If the Son needed to die before He could bring many sons to glory, why would our path be different?

The Honesty About Difficulty

But let's be brutally honest: this is hard. This is costly. This is painful. And pretending otherwise is dishonest and damaging.

Billy Graham—one of the most prominent Christians of the 20th century, someone you'd expect to have "arrived" spiritually—admitted: "The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'"

If Billy Graham had moments of deep discouragement, if he came to God with tears, if he needed forgiveness and help—then you will too. And that's okay. That's normal. That's honest Christianity, not defeated Christianity.

Dying to self isn't a one-time victory followed by smooth sailing. It's a daily battle. Some days you win. Some days you lose. Some days you don't even want to fight. And on those days, you come to God with tears and say, "Help me."

This is the paradox: dying to self is both something that's already happened (past tense: "I have been crucified") and something that must keep happening (present continuous: "I am being crucified"). It's both positional reality and daily practice. Both legal status and lived experience.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

You've already died with Christ—that's settled, secure, accomplished at conversion. But you must keep dying to self—that's ongoing, daily, requiring fresh surrender every morning.

And some days, you won't want to. Some days, you'll resent it. Some days, you'll try to avoid it. And that's when you need to remember: the grain that refuses to die remains alone. But the grain that falls into the ground and dies bears much fruit.

Daily Dying, Daily Rising

Jesus makes the death requirement explicit and ongoing: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

Notice the word: *daily*. Not once. Not occasionally. Not when you feel spiritual. Daily. Every single day. Without exception. Without vacation.

Taking Up Your Cross Daily

We've domesticated the cross. We've turned it into jewelry, decorative art, architectural elements. We've stripped it of its horror and made it comfortable, pretty, safe.

But in Jesus's day, the cross meant one thing and one thing only: death. Cruel, public, humiliating death. When Jesus said "take up your cross," His audience understood exactly what He meant: volunteer for execution. Choose death. Embrace what everything in you wants to avoid.

And He added "daily." Not one dramatic moment of surrender. Daily death. Daily execution. Daily volunteering for what you died to yesterday.

Why daily? Because resurrection happens daily too. Because every morning, self wants to climb back on the throne. Every day, pride wants to reassert control. Every 24 hours, your old nature tries to reestablish dominance.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

So every day, you must die again. Pick up the cross again. Volunteer for execution again.

This is exhausting to our performance-oriented minds. We want to achieve victory once and be done. We want to die to self one time and never have to deal with it again. We want permanent transformation without daily surrender.

But that's not how it works. The Christian life isn't a destination you arrive at. It's a cross you carry. Daily. Until you die physically or Christ returns.

Carrying the Dying of Jesus

Paul describes this daily dying in visceral terms: "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:10-11).

Always carrying about. Not sometimes. Not when convenient. Always. It's a constant reality, not an occasional event.

The dying of Jesus. Not generic suffering. Not random difficulty. The specific pattern of Christ's death—self-giving, others-focused, obedient to the Father, surrendered to His will.

So that the life of Jesus may be manifested. This is the purpose. The death isn't meaningless masochism. The dying creates space for life. Your death makes room for His life. Your decrease enables His increase (John 3:30).

And notice: "constantly being delivered over to death." Present continuous tense. Ongoing action. You're being handed over to death experiences—not just physical death but death to self, death to comfort, death to control—so that Jesus's life can be displayed through you.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is the mechanism of transformation. This is how glory emerges. Not through self-improvement efforts, but through self-death that creates space for Christ's life.

The Manifestation of Life Through Death

But here's where it gets beautiful: death produces life. Your dying manifests His living. Your weakness displays His strength. Your brokenness reveals His healing.

This is why Paul could glory in his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Not because he enjoyed suffering, but because weakness was the canvas on which Christ's strength was most clearly displayed.

When you're strong, people see you. When you're weak, people see Christ in you. When you're succeeding through your own ability, you get the credit. When you're succeeding despite obvious weakness, God gets the glory.

This is the paradox: the more you die, the more Christ lives through you. The more you decrease, the more He increases. The more you surrender, the more His power is released.

You can't experience resurrection life without first experiencing death. You can't know the power of His resurrection without first entering the fellowship of His sufferings (Philippians 3:10). Death is the doorway to life. Always. Without exception.

The Exchanged Life

Now we need to understand something crucial: what Paul describes isn't self-improvement. It's self-replacement. It's not making the old you better. It's replacing the old you entirely.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

Not: "I've improved significantly." Not: "I'm becoming a better version of myself." Not: "I'm working on my issues."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

It is no longer I who live. The old I—the self-centered, self-protecting, self-promoting I—is dead. Crucified. Executed. Gone.

But Christ lives in me. Someone else has taken up residence. Someone else is now living my life. Someone else is the operational center of my existence.

Not Improved, But Exchanged

The gospel isn't about becoming a better you. It's about becoming someone else entirely—or rather, letting Someone else become you.

This is radically different from every other religious system and every self-help philosophy. They all promise to help you improve yourself, to reach your potential, to become your best self.

But Christianity says: your best self isn't good enough. Your full potential is still fallen. Your improved self is still infected with sin. You don't need improvement. You need death and resurrection. You need to stop being you and start being Christ-in-you.

Colossians 3:3 states this bluntly: "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

You have died. Past tense. Accomplished fact. At the moment of salvation, you died. The old you—the Adamic nature, the sin-dominated self, the independent autonomous I—died on the cross with Christ.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your real life, your true identity, your actual existence is no longer located in you. It's located in Christ, who is located in God. You're hidden. Concealed. Absorbed into Him.

This is the most secure position imaginable. Your life isn't exposed to the fluctuations of circumstance, the opinions of others, the attacks of the enemy. It's hidden. Protected. Secure. Not because you're strong enough to defend it, but because it's hidden in Christ, who is hidden in God—three layers of divine protection.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Christ as Your Life

But Colossians 3:4 goes even further: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Christ, who is our life. Not "Christ, who gives us life" or "Christ, who improves our life." Christ IS our life. He's not a supplement to your existing life. He's the replacement of your old life.

This is the exchanged life. Not Christ plus you. Christ instead of you. Not Jesus helping you be a better you. Jesus being Himself through you while you get out of the way.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, discovered this truth after years of exhausting effort to live the Christian life in his own strength. He wrote: "How then to have our faith increased? Only by thinking of all that Jesus is and all He is for us: His life, His death, His work, He Himself as revealed to us in the Word, to be the subject of our constant thoughts. Not a striving to have faith... but a looking at the Faithful One seems all we need."

Not striving. Looking. Not trying harder. Trusting more fully. Not improving self. Replacing self with Christ.

The Daily Practice of Exchange

So what does this look like practically? How do you live the exchanged life day by day?

Every morning, you affirm the death. You remind yourself: "I have been crucified with Christ. The old me is dead. It's no longer I who live."

You consciously surrender control. You say, "Christ, You live in me. This day belongs to You. These decisions are Yours to make. This body is Yours to use. These words are Yours to speak."

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You catch yourself returning to self-life. And you will. Multiple times a day. You'll slip back into self-centeredness, self-protection, self-promotion. And when you catch it, you remind yourself: "That's not who I am anymore. I died. Christ lives here now."

You rely on His life, not yours. When you need strength, you don't try to generate it. You receive His. When you need wisdom, you don't depend on your understanding. You ask for His. When you need love for someone difficult, you don't manufacture it. You allow His love to flow through you.

This is what Paul means when he says, "and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

He's still living in the flesh—he still has a physical body, still makes daily decisions, still interacts with the world. But he's living by faith. By constant dependence. By moment-by-moment reliance on Christ's life rather than his own.

This is why Paul could say in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Not "I can do all things because I'm strong." Through Him. Through His strength. Through His life operating in my weakness.

Resurrection Power Released

But here's the magnificent part: death releases resurrection power. As you die to self, Christ's life is unleashed through you. As you decrease, His power increases. As you surrender, His strength is perfected.

Philippians 3:10 captures Paul's driving ambition: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

Notice the order: know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, conformity to His death.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Knowing the Resurrection Power

The resurrection is the greatest display of power in human history. Death—the ultimate enemy, the final barrier, the unconquerable foe—was defeated. Destroyed. Made powerless.

And that same power is available to you. Now. Today. In your current circumstances.

Romans 8:11 promises: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

The same Spirit. The same power. The power that raised Jesus from death is dwelling in you, giving life to your mortal body. Not just keeping you alive physically, but bringing resurrection life into your daily experience.

This is the power to love when you're empty. The power to forgive when you're wounded. The power to hope when circumstances are hopeless. The power to obey when everything in you wants to rebel. The power to endure when you want to quit.

It's not your power. It's resurrection power. The life-from-death power that only God possesses. And it's available to you through the Spirit who lives in you.

The Fellowship of His Sufferings

But notice what comes with resurrection power: fellowship of His sufferings. You can't separate them. You can't have the power without the suffering. You can't experience resurrection without first experiencing death.

Fellowship (*koinōnia*) means participation, sharing, partnership. You're not just learning about Christ's sufferings. You're participating in them. Sharing them. Partnering with Him in the pattern of suffering-then-glory.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This isn't punishment. It's privilege. It's the pathway to intimacy with Christ that's available in no other way. You know Him differently through suffering than through ease. You experience Him differently in weakness than in strength. You encounter Him differently in brokenness than in wholeness.

Some of Christ's character can only be known through suffering. His comfort only means something when you're hurting. His strength only becomes real when you're weak. His presence only becomes precious when you feel abandoned.

And the deeper you go into the fellowship of His sufferings, the more you know Him. Not just know about Him. Know Him. Intimately. Experientially. In ways that those who've never suffered deeply cannot know.

Conformed to His Death

And the result? Being "conformed to His death." Taking on the same shape. Following the same pattern. Experiencing the same death-to-life transformation that He experienced.

This is the goal. Not to avoid death, but to embrace it. Not to skip suffering, but to let it conform you to Christ's pattern. Not to resist the cross, but to carry it daily, knowing that resurrection follows crucifixion.

Every time you die to self and Christ's life emerges through you, you're experiencing mini-resurrections. Every time you surrender control and His power is displayed, you're participating in resurrection reality. Every time you choose weakness and His strength is perfected, you're being conformed to His death-and-resurrection pattern.

And these daily mini-resurrections are preparing you for the final, complete, ultimate resurrection when Christ returns and every limitation of this mortal flesh is finally removed.

The Power Made Perfect

2 Corinthians 12:9 records Christ's words to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Perfected. Not just present, but perfected. Completed. Brought to full maturity. Displayed in its clearest form.

Where? In weakness. In death. In surrender. In the places where you have nothing left to offer but desperate dependence on Him.

This is why Paul could say, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Boast about weaknesses. Gladly. Because weakness is the canvas on which Christ's power is most brilliantly displayed. Death is the soil in which resurrection life grows. Surrender is the doorway through which His strength enters.

You're not trying to become strong enough to serve God. You're becoming weak enough to let God's strength serve through you. You're not trying to improve yourself to the point where God can use you. You're dying to yourself to the point where only God can get the credit for what happens through you.

Living the Crucified Life

So how do you actually live this? How do you embrace daily death and experience resurrection power?

First, start each day with surrender. Before you do anything else, consciously affirm: "I died with Christ. I no longer live. Christ lives in me. Today belongs to Him."

Second, watch for moments of self-assertion. Throughout the day, catch yourself returning to self-centeredness, self-protection, self-promotion. And in those moments, return to the cross. "I died. This isn't about me. Christ lives here now."

Third, expect the death to hurt. Don't be surprised when dying to self is painful. Crucifixion isn't comfortable. Death isn't pleasant. But remember: it's producing resurrection life. The pain is purposeful.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Fourth, rely on the Spirit. You can't crucify yourself. You can't die to self through self-effort. That's a contradiction. You can position yourself on the cross through surrender, but only the Spirit can make the death effective. Only He can bring the resurrection life.

Fifth, look for the fruit. As you die to self, watch for Christ's life emerging. More patience with difficult people. More peace in stressful circumstances. More love for the unlovable. More joy despite difficulties. That's resurrection power at work.

Sixth, embrace weakness. Stop hiding your limitations. Stop pretending you have it all together. Stop trying to appear strong. Your weakness is where His power shines brightest.

Seventh, remember the purpose. You're not dying for death's sake. You're dying so Christ can live through you. So His glory can be revealed. So others can see Him in you and be drawn to Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Not come and improve. Not come and achieve. Not come and succeed. Come and die.

But he didn't stop there. He also wrote: "The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world...When we cease to take our sufferings seriously, there is no longer any possibility of becoming conformed to Christ's death."

Taking your sufferings seriously. Seeing them as participation in Christ's pattern. Understanding that the death you're experiencing isn't random or meaningless—it's conforming you to His image, preparing you for His glory.

This is the crucified life. It's not easy. It's not comfortable. It's not what you naturally want. But it's the only pathway to resurrection power. The only road to glory. The only way to experience Christ's life flowing through you in ways that transform you and impact everyone around you.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. But when it does—when it finally surrenders its protected husk and lets itself be buried in darkness—it produces a harvest far beyond what it could ever produce alone.

You are that grain. The call is to die. Daily. Repeatedly. Completely.

But the promise is resurrection. Life from death. Power from weakness. Glory from suffering. Christ's life replacing your life. His strength perfected in your weakness. His power released through your surrender.

This is the crucified life. This is the path to glory. And there's no shortcut around the cross.

"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection."—

Romans 6:4-5 (NASB)

PART THREE: THE MANIFESTATION OF GLORY

Living as Light Bearers

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 7

Vessels of Glory—Treasure in Earthen Vessels

"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." — 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NASB)

I once counseled a woman who couldn't understand why God would use her.

She'd made too many mistakes, she said. Her past was too messy. Her struggles were too visible. Her weaknesses were too obvious. Surely God needed stronger vessels, more impressive containers, people who had it more together.

"Look at me," she said, gesturing to herself with something between disgust and despair. "I'm broken. I'm damaged. I'm... cracked."

I paused, then asked her a question: "Have you ever seen light shine through stained glass?"

She nodded, confused by the shift.

"The cracks and imperfections—they don't diminish the light. They diffract it. They break it into colors. They make it more beautiful, not less. The glory isn't in the glass. The glory is in the light passing through the glass. And sometimes, the light shines brightest through the broken places."

This is what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 4:7. We are earthen vessels—clay pots, fragile containers, breakable and common. We're not the treasure. We hold the treasure. We're not the glory. We carry the glory. We're not the power. We're the cracked pots through which power is displayed.

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And this isn't an accident. This isn't God making the best of a bad situation, working with flawed materials because perfect ones weren't available. This is God's intentional design. His deliberate strategy. His brilliant plan to ensure that when glory is displayed, no one can miss where it's coming from.

The contrast is the point. The weakness is the canvas. The brokenness is the stage. Because when infinite glory shines through obvious weakness, there's no question about the source.

This is the manifestation of glory: not God using impressive people to do impressive things, but God using broken people to display His unbreakable power. Not strong vessels containing strength, but fragile vessels revealing the strength that sustains them.

The Contrast Design

Let's start with the fundamental truth: God chooses weak vessels on purpose. This isn't a consolation prize. This isn't settling for second best. This is intentional strategy.

Glory in Fragile Containers

The phrase "earthen vessels" (ostrakinos skeuos) refers to common clay pots—the disposable containers of the ancient world. Not fine china. Not silver. Not gold. Clay. Breakable, replaceable, ordinary.

These were the storage containers everyone used. For water. For grain. For olive oil. For garbage. Nothing special. Nothing impressive. Functional, but forgettable.

And Paul says: this is what we are. Clay pots. Earthen vessels. Fragile containers.

But inside these ordinary, breakable pots? "This treasure." The glory of God. The knowledge of Christ. The light of the new creation. Infinite value in finite containers. Eternal glory in temporal vessels. Divine power in human weakness.

The contrast couldn't be more stark. The difference couldn't be more obvious. And that's exactly the point.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Why would God choose this design? Paul answers: "so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves."

When a magnificent container holds magnificent treasure, you're impressed by both. When a fragile, broken container holds magnificent treasure, you're impressed only by the treasure—and amazed that the container can hold it without shattering.

This is God's brilliant design. By choosing weak vessels, He ensures that the glory goes where it belongs—to Him alone.

God's Intentional Choice of Weakness

But let's go deeper. God doesn't just tolerate our weakness. He intentionally chooses weak people. He actively seeks out the broken, the flawed, the obviously inadequate.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 makes this explicit: "but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God."

Notice the repetition: "God has chosen...God has chosen...God has chosen." This is active selection. Intentional picking. Deliberate strategy.

And what has He chosen?

- The foolish (not the wise)
- The weak (not the strong)
- The base (not the noble)
- The despised (not the respected)
- The things that are not (not the things that are impressive)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Why? "So that no man may boast before God." So that glory goes exclusively to Him. So that power is clearly attributed to its true source.

If God only used impressive people to accomplish impressive things, we'd never know whether the power came from God or from the person. But when God uses nobodies to accomplish somethings, when He uses broken people to display wholeness, when He uses weak people to manifest strength—there's no ambiguity about the source.

Charles Spurgeon understood this: "God's strength is best perfected in our weakness." Not just displayed in weakness. *Perfected* in weakness. Brought to its fullest expression. Made most clearly visible.

Demonstrated most convincingly.

Your weakness isn't a problem God has to overcome. It's the platform He's chosen to showcase His power.

The Freedom of Being a Clay Pot

Here's what this means practically: you can stop pretending to be more than you are. You can stop hiding your cracks. You can stop trying to present yourself as an impressive vessel.

Because God already knows you're a clay pot. He chose you specifically because you're a clay pot. Your weakness doesn't surprise Him. Your limitations don't concern Him. Your brokenness doesn't disqualify you.

In fact, your brokenness might be exactly what qualifies you. Because the glory shines brightest through the cracks.

Think about it: a perfectly intact clay pot keeps its contents hidden. You can't see what's inside. But a cracked pot? The treasure leaks out. The light shines through. The contents become visible.

Your wounds, your struggles, your failures, your weaknesses—these aren't barriers to God using you. They're the very places where His glory becomes most visible. Not despite your brokenness, but through your brokenness.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This should be incredibly freeing. You don't have to be impressive. You don't have to have it all together. You don't have to pretend you're stronger than you are. You're a clay pot. That's all you're supposed to be. And clay pots carrying divine treasure bring more glory to God than gold vessels containing their own glory ever could.

The Light Within

But what exactly is this treasure we carry? Paul defines it: "the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

That's dense. Let's unpack it layer by layer.

New Creation Light

Paul begins with a creation parallel: "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts."

This echoes Genesis 1:3: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." The first creative act. The first word spoken into formless void. The first separation of order from chaos.

Paul is saying: what happened in original creation has happened in you. The same God who spoke light into primordial darkness has spoken light into your heart. You've experienced new creation. You're not just improved. You're remade. Not reformed. Regenerated.

And this light isn't natural. It's not inherent to you. It's not something you developed or discovered. God "shone in our hearts." He was the active agent. He provided the light. He created the illumination.

Just as the original creation didn't generate its own light—God spoke it into being—so new creation doesn't generate its own light. God shines it into being.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

You are a container for divine light. A vessel for new creation glory. An earthen pot carrying the same light that illuminated the cosmos.

Life and Light

John 1:4-5 connects life and light: "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

The light isn't just illumination. It's life itself. Where there's light, there's life. Where there's darkness, there's death. The light you carry isn't just information or inspiration. It's life-giving, death-defeating, darkness-penetrating reality.

This is why your life—even with all its weakness and brokenness—can impact people. It's not your personality, your charisma, your intelligence, or your abilities. It's the life-light dwelling in you. Christ's light. New creation light. The light that shines in darkness and cannot be overcome by it.

People are drawn to light. Not because the container is impressive, but because light is inherently attractive to those living in darkness. When someone lost in darkness encounters even a small light, they move toward it—not because they're impressed by the lamp, but because they desperately need illumination.

You are that lamp. A clay lamp. Fragile and ordinary. But carrying light that people desperately need.

The Treasure Defined

Paul gets even more specific: this light gives "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Three critical elements here:

Knowledge. Not information, but experiential knowledge (gnōsis). Not facts about God, but intimate acquaintance with God. Not theology about glory, but experience of glory.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Glory of God. Not abstract concepts. Not philosophical ideas. Not religious principles. God's glory—His character, His nature, His essence made visible and knowable.

In the face of Christ. This is crucial. Where is God's glory revealed? Not in nature alone (though creation declares His glory). Not in Scripture alone (though the Word reveals His character). Supremely, definitively, personally in "the face of Christ."

Hebrews 1:3 says it plainly: "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature."

Jesus doesn't just tell you about God's glory. He is God's glory made visible. He doesn't just explain God's nature. He is the exact representation—the perfect imprint, the precise expression—of God's nature.

You want to see God's glory? Look at Christ. You want to know God's character? Look at Christ. You want to experience God's presence? Look at Christ.

And the treasure you carry—the light shining in your heart—is this: the knowledge of God's glory as it's revealed in Jesus's face.

Glory Made Personal

This is what separates Christianity from every other religion. We don't worship abstract glory. We worship glory with a face. We don't serve a distant, unknowable power. We know the glory personally because we know Christ personally.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you" (Exodus 33:19). God's glory is His goodness. His character. His nature.

And then, centuries later, God did exactly that—He made His glory pass before us in the person of Christ. John 1:14 declares: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

We saw His glory. Not a concept. Not an idea. His glory—visible, tangible, personal. Glory in a face. Glory with a name. Glory that walked dusty roads, touched lepers, wept at graves, and died on a cross.

This is the treasure in your earthen vessel: personal knowledge of glory revealed in Christ. Not religious information. Not theological data. Living acquaintance with the living God as He's revealed in the face of Jesus.

And when this light shines through your cracked clay pot—when people encounter Christ through your weakness, your brokenness, your obvious inadequacy—they're encountering glory. Not your glory. His glory. Glory that transforms, heals, saves, restores.

The Knowledge of Glory in Christ's Face

Let's pause here and really contemplate what it means that God's glory is revealed in Christ's face.

Not Abstract, But Personal

Ancient religions conceived of glory as terrifying, unapproachable, consuming. Moses couldn't see God's face and live (Exodus 33:20). The priests couldn't enter the Holy of Holies without elaborate preparation and the right bloodline. God's glory was dangerous, distant, deadly to sinners.

But then Jesus came. And John writes: "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18).

The word "explained" (exēgeomai—where we get "exegesis") means to lead out, to declare, to make fully known. Jesus doesn't just hint at what God is like. He fully reveals Him. He explains Him. He makes Him knowable.

And notice: "the only begotten God." Not just a prophet. Not just a teacher. Not just a representative. God Himself, in human form, making divine glory accessible, knowable, approachable.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

When Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us," Jesus replied: "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9).

Glory isn't abstract anymore. Glory has a face. And that face looks like Jesus.

Glory That Touches

But here's what makes this even more remarkable: this glory didn't remain distant. It touched. It embraced. It got close.

Jesus touched lepers (Matthew 8:3). Unthinkable. Lepers were unclean, untouchable, isolated. But glory in flesh reached out and touched disease, declaring: "I am willing; be cleansed."

Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb (John 11:35). Glory experienced human grief. Glory felt loss. Glory cried.

Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:5). Glory knelt. Glory served. Glory took the position of a slave.

Jesus hung on a cross (John 19:18). Glory bled. Glory suffered. Glory died.

This is the glory revealed in Christ's face. Not distant, pristine, untouchable glory. Glory that enters our mess, our pain, our brokenness. Glory that's willing to be misunderstood, rejected, crucified—so that we might be saved.

Glory We Can Know

And now—now—this same glory dwells in us. The knowledge of God's glory in Christ's face isn't external information we learn. It's internal illumination we experience.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Ephesians 1:17-18 captures Paul's prayer: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling."

The eyes of your heart. Not just intellectual comprehension. Heart knowledge. Experiential knowledge. The kind of knowing that transforms, not just informs.

This is the treasure in your earthen vessel: heart-knowledge of God's glory as revealed in Jesus. And this treasure isn't just for you to hoard. It's for you to carry. To display. To leak out through your cracks so others can see it.

When people encounter you—when they interact with you, work with you, observe you in difficulty—what should they see? Not your impressiveness. Not your strength. Not your accomplishments.

They should see light. Christ's light. Glory leaking through your obvious weakness. The knowledge of God revealed in Christ, now visible through you—not because you're spectacular, but because the treasure you carry is spectacular.

The Power Attribution

Now we come to the ultimate purpose of the earthen vessel design: ensuring proper attribution of power and glory.

So That Glory Goes to God Alone

Paul is explicit about the purpose: "so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves."

The Greek phrase "surpassing greatness" (hyperbolē tēs dynameōs) means excess of power, power beyond measure, overwhelming force. This isn't ordinary power. This is extraordinary, excessive, over-the-top power.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

And the purpose of the earthen vessel design is to ensure this power is properly attributed—to God, not to us.

When an obviously weak person accomplishes something obviously beyond their capacity, there's no ambiguity about the source. When a cracked clay pot carries infinite treasure without shattering, everyone knows the power isn't in the pot.

This is why God continually chooses weak people for significant tasks:

- Moses with his speech impediment to confront Pharaoh
- Gideon the coward to lead an army
- David the shepherd boy to defeat Goliath
- Mary the teenage girl to bear the Messiah
- Peter the denier to lead the church
- Paul the persecutor to evangelize the Gentiles

In each case, the weakness of the vessel ensures the glory goes to God alone.

The Boasting Problem

Human nature wants to take credit. We want recognition. We want people to be impressed with us. We want to believe we're valuable because we've accomplished valuable things.

But this is exactly what God's design prevents. 1 Corinthians 1:29 states it plainly: "so that no man may boast before God."

Not "so that man can boast a little." Not "so that man shares the glory." So that no man may boast. Period. At all. Before God.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Because the moment we start taking credit, we've stolen glory that belongs to God alone. The moment we start believing our own press, we've forgotten we're clay pots, not treasure. The moment we start thinking our strength accomplished something, we've missed the entire point.

Isaiah 42:8 declares God's position: "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images."

God shares His glory with no one. Not because He's insecure or petty, but because He alone is worthy of glory. He alone is the source of power. He alone deserves credit for what He accomplishes.

And by using weak vessels, He ensures the glory stays where it belongs.

Freedom From Performance

Here's the liberating part: when you understand you're an earthen vessel, you're free from performance pressure.

You don't have to be impressive. The treasure has to be impressive—and it is. You don't have to appear strong. The power has to be strong—and it is. You don't have to seem perfect. The glory has to be perfect—and it is.

Your job isn't to be spectacular. Your job is to be available. To be surrendered. To be a container willing to carry treasure, knowing the treasure is infinitely more valuable than the container.

This removes the crushing burden of self-promotion, image management, and reputation protection. You're not protecting your reputation. You're carrying His glory. You're not building your brand. You're displaying His power. You're not establishing your ministry. You're being His vessel.

And when people are helped, healed, encouraged, or saved through your ministry—when light shines through your cracks and impacts someone—you can give glory to God with complete honesty. Because you know the power wasn't yours. The light wasn't yours. The treasure wasn't yours.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

You were just the clay pot. Broken, ordinary, replaceable. But carrying something infinitely precious that happened to leak through your cracks at exactly the right moment.

Watching for Glory Theft

But we need to be vigilant. Our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). We're prone to glory theft. We subtly, unconsciously start taking credit for what God has done through us.

Watch for these warning signs:

- Hurt when you're not recognized
- Resentment when others get credit
- Pride when ministry succeeds
- Despair when ministry fails (as if success depended on you)
- Comparison with others' ministries
- Anxiety about reputation or image
- Defensiveness when criticized

These are signs you've forgotten you're a clay pot. Signs you've started believing you're the treasure, not just the vessel. Signs glory is being attributed to the wrong source.

When you catch these patterns, return to the truth: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves."

You're the vessel. God is the power. The glory is His alone.

Living as an Earthen Vessel

So how do you actually live this out? How do you embrace being a clay pot carrying divine treasure?

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First, admit your weakness. Stop pretending. Stop hiding. Stop trying to appear stronger than you are. Your weakness isn't a problem to solve—it's the platform for God's glory.

Second, treasure the treasure. Don't focus on improving the container. Focus on cherishing what the container holds. Your job isn't to become a better pot. Your job is to guard, honor, and display the treasure.

Third, let the light shine through the cracks. Your wounds, your struggles, your failures—these aren't things to hide. They're places where light can escape. Don't seal them. Let the treasure leak out.

Fourth, attribute power properly. When something good happens through your ministry, immediately and consistently give glory to God. Don't deflect insincerely, but don't accept credit that belongs to Him.

Fifth, rest in your ordinariness. You don't have to be spectacular. God chose ordinary vessels on purpose. Your ordinariness is part of the design, not a flaw in it.

Sixth, maintain humility. Remember: you're clay. Valuable only because of what you carry, not because of what you are. This isn't self-hatred. It's honest assessment. Clay pots aren't worthless—they're useful. But they're not treasure.

Seventh, stay surrendered. A vessel that refuses to be filled, refuses to be carried where the Master wants to take it, or refuses to pour out when needed—is useless. Your surrender determines your usefulness, not your impressiveness.

A.W. Tozer wrote: "The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven't yet come to the end of themselves. We're still trying to give orders, and interfering with God's work within us."

Come to the end of yourself. Acknowledge you're a clay pot. Accept that you're weak, fragile, ordinary. And then watch what God does with weak vessels who are surrendered to His use.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Because when glory shines through obvious weakness, when power is displayed through apparent powerlessness, when treasure is visible in earthen vessels—there's no question about the source.

The glory goes where it belongs. The power is attributed correctly. And God alone receives the praise.

This is the manifestation of glory: not impressive people doing impressive things, but weak people carrying infinite treasure, leaking light through their cracks, and directing every eye to the true source of power.

You are an earthen vessel. Embrace it. Glory in it. Let the treasure shine through it.

Because the world doesn't need more impressive people pretending to have it all together. The world needs more honest people admitting they're broken but carrying a treasure that makes them whole.

Be the clay pot. Carry the treasure. Let the light shine through the cracks.

And watch God get the glory He alone deserves.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."— **1 Corinthians 15:10 (NASB)**

CHAPTER 8

Children of Light—Walking in His Glory

"for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."
— **Ephesians 5:8-10 (NASB)**

There's a critical distinction in Paul's language that changes everything.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

He doesn't say you were *in* darkness. He says you *were* darkness. Not that you lived in a dark place, but that darkness defined your essence. Not that you did dark things, but that darkness was your nature.

And he doesn't say you now have light or carry light. He says you *are* light. Not that you've acquired something external, but that light now defines your essential identity. Not that you possess illumination, but that you've become illumination itself.

This is identity language, not behavior language. Ontology, not just morality. Being, not just doing.

And this distinction matters profoundly because it changes the entire framework of Christian living. You're not trying to become light. You are light. You're not trying to stop being darkness. You're no longer darkness. The transformation has already happened. The identity shift is complete. The question is whether you'll walk in alignment with who you already are.

Most Christians get this backwards. They think: "I need to walk as children of light so that I can become light." But Paul says: "You are light in the Lord, therefore walk as children of light."

Identity precedes behavior. Being determines doing. Who you are shapes how you live.

This is the manifestation of glory: not striving to become something you're not, but learning to live as who you already are in Christ. Not trying to generate light through moral effort, but allowing the light that's already in you to shine through increasingly surrendered living.

You were darkness. You are light. Now walk as light. This is the progression. This is the calling. This is what it means to live as children of light in a dark world.

Identity Transformation: From Darkness to Light

Let's start with the radical nature of this transformation. This isn't tweaking. This isn't improvement. This isn't character development. This is death and resurrection. This is darkness becoming light. This is ontological transformation—a change in the very nature of your being.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

You Were Darkness

Notice Paul doesn't soften this. He doesn't say "you did some dark things" or "you had some darkness in you" or "you were influenced by darkness." He says you *were* darkness.

This was your essential nature before Christ. Not just your behavior, but your being. Not just your actions, but your identity. Darkness wasn't something you had; darkness was who you were.

Ephesians 2:1-3 describes this condition: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Dead. Walking according to the world. Dominated by the prince of darkness. Living in lusts. Children of wrath *by nature*. This was your identity. Your essence. Your being.

Darkness wasn't just what you did. It was what you were. And no amount of self-improvement could change that. No religious activity could transform darkness into light. No moral effort could alter your essential nature.

This is why the gospel isn't about self-improvement. It's about new creation. It's not about becoming a better version of darkness. It's about darkness being replaced by light entirely.

You Are Light

But then comes the glorious "but now." The transformative transition. The ontological shift.

"But now you are Light in the Lord."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Not "you have light." Not "you're moving toward light." Not "you're trying to become light." You *are* light. Present tense. Current reality. Accomplished fact.

This is new creation language. 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

The old—darkness—passed away. Went away. Ceased to be your identity. And new things—light—have come. Arrived. Become your new reality.

This isn't gradual evolution. This is radical transformation. At the moment of salvation, something fundamental changed in your nature. You didn't just receive an infusion of light to brighten your darkness. Your darkness was replaced by light. You became light.

1 Peter 2:9 celebrates this transformation: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Notice the movement: *out of* darkness, *into* light. Not gradual transition. Decisive transfer. From one realm to another. From one kingdom to another. From one identity to another.

Colossians 1:13 confirms: "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."

Rescued. Transferred. Past tense. Already accomplished. Not a work in progress, but a completed reality.

You were darkness. You are light. The transformation has already happened.

In the Lord

But notice the crucial qualifier: "you are Light *in the Lord*."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This isn't self-generated light. This isn't inherent luminosity. This isn't natural radiance. You're light *in the Lord*—because of your union with Christ, because of your position in Him, because His nature has become your nature through the miracle of regeneration.

Apart from Christ, you're still darkness. But in Christ—in union with Him, in vital connection to Him, in living relationship with Him—you are light because He is light.

John 8:12 records Jesus's words: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

Jesus is the source. He is the Light. And when you're in Him, His light becomes your light. Not by transfer, but by union. Not by proximity, but by participation in His nature.

2 Peter 1:4 describes this as becoming "partakers of the divine nature." You share in Christ's nature. His character becomes your character. His light becomes your light. Not in degree (you're not becoming divine), but in kind (you participate in divine life and light).

This is the foundation of Christian identity: you are what you are because of who Christ is and because you're in Him. Your identity is derivative, not original. Your light is reflected, not self-generated. Your nature is gift, not achievement.

But it's real. It's actual. It's not pretend or positional fiction. You truly are light in the Lord. This is your current, present, actual identity.

Walking Worthy of the Calling

Now comes the imperative: "walk as children of Light."

Notice Paul doesn't say "become children of light." He says you are light, therefore *walk as* what you already are. Let your behavior align with your identity. Let your actions express your nature. Let your life manifest what's already true about you.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Walking Metaphor

"Walking" (peripateō) in Scripture refers to your daily conduct, your habitual lifestyle, your ordinary choices. It's not dramatic, high-visibility moments. It's the accumulation of daily steps in a consistent direction.

Your walk is how you live when nobody's watching. How you respond when you're tired. What you choose when it's inconvenient. How you treat people who can't benefit you. What you think about when your mind is unguarded.

Walking is:

- **Daily:** Not occasional. Not just on Sundays. Every day.
- **Directional:** Moving toward something. Your steps have a purpose.
- **Progressive:** Each step builds on the last. You're going somewhere.
- **Visible:** Others see where you're walking. Your life testifies.
- **Habitual:** It's your normal mode of operating, not exceptional effort.

And Paul says: walk *as children of Light*. Not "try to walk." Not "hope to walk." Walk. Let your daily conduct express your true identity. Let your habitual choices reflect your essential nature.

The Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1 frames this as a worthy walk: "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

Worthy (axiōs) means "of equal weight," balanced, matching. Your walk should be worthy of—should match, should balance out—the incredible calling you've received.

Think about the calling: You've been called out of darkness into light. Called to be children of God. Called to be holy. Called to display His glory. Called to be His representatives. Called to bear His image. Called to eternal life.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is an extraordinary calling. An undeserved privilege. An incomprehensible honor.

And Paul says: walk in a manner that matches that calling. Let your life be proportionate to the grace you've received. Let your conduct be commensurate with your position. Let your choices reflect the magnitude of what you've been given.

This isn't legalism. This isn't earning God's favor. This is living in alignment with who you've become. This is letting your practice match your position. This is consistency between identity and activity.

When someone is knighted by the Queen, they don't become nobility through good behavior. They're declared nobility, and then they learn to live in a manner worthy of that title. The identity creates the obligation, not vice versa.

You are light. Now walk worthy of that identity. You are a child of God. Now live in a manner that matches that relationship. You've been transferred into Christ's kingdom. Now conduct yourself as a kingdom citizen.

The Daily Choice

But here's what we need to be honest about: this requires daily choice. Moment-by-moment decisions. Constant recalibration.

Your identity is settled—you are light in the Lord. But your walk is daily chosen—you must actively walk as light.

Why? Because you still live in a dark world. Because you still inhabit fallen flesh. Because you're still subject to temptation, distraction, and deception. Because old patterns die hard and old habits resist abandonment.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Romans 6:12-13 captures this tension: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Notice the imperatives: *do not let, do not present, present yourselves*. These are choices. Commands. Active decisions required of you.

Sin wants to reign. Old patterns want to reassert themselves. Darkness wants to pull you back. And you must choose—daily, hourly, moment by moment—to walk as light instead of returning to darkness.

This is the daily discipline of discipleship. Not earning your identity, but expressing your identity. Not becoming light, but walking as the light you already are.

Every morning, you wake up and choose: Will I walk in the light today? Will I make choices consistent with my identity as a child of light? Will I let my behavior express my being?

This is the worthy walk. And it requires vigilance, intentionality, and dependence on the Spirit who dwells in you.

Bearing the Fruit of Light

Now Paul gets specific about what walking as light looks like. It's not vague spirituality. It's concrete character: "for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

Fruit, Not Works

Notice Paul calls these "fruit," not "works." This is crucial.

Works suggest effort, labor, human production. Fruit suggests organic growth, natural outcome, inevitable result of being connected to the right source.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Jesus established this in John 15:4-5: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Fruit happens through abiding, not striving. Through connection, not effort. Through remaining in vital union with Christ, not trying to produce results through willpower.

When you're light in the Lord—when you're in vital union with Christ who is Light—fruit happens naturally. Not effortlessly, but organically. Not without your participation, but without you being the source.

A healthy apple tree produces apples. Not through intense effort. Not through striving. Through being what it is and remaining connected to its source of life. The fruit is the natural, inevitable expression of the tree's nature and health.

You are light. Remain in the Light. And the fruit of light will naturally emerge: goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Goodness: Moral Excellence

Goodness (agathōsynē) refers to moral excellence, benevolence, generosity of spirit. It's active kindness. Practical compassion. Tangible love.

This isn't just absence of evil. This is presence of positive good. This is actively seeking others' welfare. This is generosity that gives without calculating return. This is kindness that serves without expecting recognition.

Goodness is seeing a need and meeting it. Noticing pain and bringing comfort. Recognizing injustice and pursuing righteousness. Spotting opportunities to help and taking them.

When light shines, things grow. Light brings life, warmth, energy. You are light—and where you walk, goodness should blossom. Generosity should flourish. Kindness should multiply.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is the fruit of light: active, practical, tangible good done to others because light is your nature and goodness is light's inevitable expression.

Righteousness: Right Relationship

Righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) means right relationship—with God and with others. It's conformity to God's character. Alignment with His will. Living in accordance with His design.

This isn't self-righteousness (pride in your moral achievement). This isn't legalism (keeping rules to earn favor). This is Christ's righteousness expressed through you, creating right relationships in ever-expanding circles.

Right with God—through Christ's righteousness credited to you. Right with yourself—accepting your identity in Christ without false humility or false pride. Right with others—treating people with justice, fairness, love, respect. Right with creation—stewarding resources responsibly, honoring God's world.

Righteousness is the fruit of being rightly related to the Light. When you're in right relationship with Christ, all other relationships begin to align properly. Not perfectly. Not instantly. But progressively, from glory to glory.

Truth: Reality Expressed

Truth (*alētheia*) is reality as God sees it, expressed honestly in word and deed. It's the opposite of deception, pretense, hypocrisy, and falsehood.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Truth means:

- **Honesty:** Speaking what's real, not what's convenient.
- **Authenticity:** Being who you are, not who you think you should appear to be.
- **Integrity:** Your private life matches your public persona.
- **Transparency:** Nothing hidden, nothing to hide.
- **Reliability:** Your yes means yes, your no means no (Matthew 5:37).

Truth is the fruit of light because light exposes. Light reveals. Light makes things visible as they actually are.

When you're light, you naturally move toward truth and away from deception.

This doesn't mean brutal honesty without love. Truth must be spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15). But it does mean you can't walk as light while living in deception, pretense, or falsehood.

Light and lies don't coexist. Light and hypocrisy can't occupy the same space. Light and pretense are mutually exclusive.

You are light. Therefore truth—honest, authentic, transparent truth—will be the fruit of your life.

The Glory Connection

But notice why this fruit matters. It's not just about you being a good person. It's about God receiving glory.

Matthew 5:16 makes this explicit: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

The purpose of shining isn't self-promotion. It's God's glorification. The goal of good works isn't impressing people. It's directing people's praise toward the Father.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

When people encounter goodness, righteousness, and truth in you—when they see these fruits of light—their response should be: "Wow, look what God has done in them. Praise be to God for His transforming work. Glory to the Father who produces this kind of change."

Not: "Wow, what an impressive person." But: "Wow, what a powerful God."

The fruit of light glorifies God by demonstrating His reality, revealing His character, and displaying His power to transform darkness into light.

This is the manifestation of glory: not you being impressive, but God's character becoming visible through your life because you're walking as the light you've become in Him.

Irenaeus captured this beautifully: "The glory of God is man fully alive."

When you're living as who you truly are—when you're walking as light, bearing the fruit of light, shining in darkness—you're fully alive. And that fully-alive humanity brings glory to God because it displays what He can do with surrendered darkness transformed into light.

Discerning What Pleases Him

But how do you know how to walk? How do you discern what choices align with your identity as light? How do you learn what pleases the Lord?

Paul addresses this: "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."

The Learning Process

The word "trying to learn" (dokimazō) means to test, to prove, to discern through examination. It suggests active investigation, thoughtful consideration, careful assessment.

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This isn't instant knowledge downloaded at conversion. This is progressive learning. Ongoing discernment. Continuous growth in understanding what pleases God.

Romans 12:2 describes this process: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

The mind must be renewed. The thinking patterns must be transformed. And through this renewal, you prove—you test and verify through experience—what God's will is.

This means:

- **Scripture study:** Learning God's revealed will in His Word.
- **Prayer:** Seeking His guidance in specific situations.
- **Wise counsel:** Learning from mature believers who've walked longer.
- **Experience:** Testing choices and learning from results.
- **Spirit's leading:** Developing sensitivity to His internal witness.

You're learning to think like Christ. To value what He values. To love what He loves. To desire what pleases Him. This doesn't happen overnight. It's a process. A journey. Progressive sanctification of your desires, values, and choices.

What Pleases the Lord

But what does please God? How do you know?

He's pleased by faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

Faith—trusting Him, depending on Him, believing His promises—pleases God. Not perfect faith. Not strong faith. But present faith. Active faith. Faith that steps out even when unsure.

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He's pleased by obedience. 1 John 3:22 says, "and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."

Obedience flows from love (John 14:15). When you love God, you want to please Him. When you want to please Him, you obey what He's revealed. Not perfectly. But progressively. From the heart, not just external compliance.

He's pleased by Christ-likeness. Romans 8:29 reveals God's ultimate plan: "to become conformed to the image of His Son." When you're becoming more like Jesus, you're moving toward what pleases God because Jesus perfectly pleased the Father.

He's pleased by love. 1 Corinthians 13 exalts love above all gifts and activities. When you love—genuinely, sacrificially, consistently—you please God because love is His essential nature (1 John 4:8).

He's pleased by humility. Micah 6:8 asks, "And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Humility—acknowledging dependence, refusing pride, maintaining childlike trust—pleases Him.

As you pursue these things—faith, obedience, Christ-likeness, love, humility—you're learning to walk as light. You're discovering what pleases the One who called you out of darkness.

The Transformation of Desires

But here's what happens as you learn what pleases God: your desires begin to change. What you want starts aligning with what He wants. Your preferences shift toward His preferences.

This is the renewing of the mind that Romans 12:2 describes. Not just new information, but new inclinations. Not just knowing what's right, but wanting what's right.

Psalm 37:4 promises: "Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart."

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How does this work? Not by God capitulating to your unchanged desires. By God transforming your desires to match His. As you delight in Him, your heart desires what His heart desires. Your pleasures align with His pleasures. Your joy coincides with His joy.

This is the fruit of walking as light: your desires increasingly reflect the desires of the Light. What pleases Him increasingly pleases you. What grieves Him increasingly grieves you. What delights Him increasingly delights you.

And this transformation of desire makes walking as light feel less like duty and more like delight. Not that it's easy. Not that it's effortless. But increasingly natural. Increasingly aligned with who you truly are.

You're light. And light naturally seeks the Light. Light naturally aligns with Light. Light naturally reflects Light.

Living as Children of Light

So what does this look like practically? How do you walk as children of light in a dark world?

First, remember your identity. Every morning, remind yourself: "I am light in the Lord. Darkness is no longer my nature. I am a child of light called to walk as light."

Second, make daily choices in light of that identity. Every decision is an opportunity to walk as light or return to darkness. Choose light. Not perfectly, but consistently. Not flawlessly, but intentionally.

Third, let your light shine without apology. Don't hide who you are. Don't dim your light to fit in. Don't apologize for walking differently than the world walks. You're light—shine.

Fourth, bear fruit naturally. Don't manufacture goodness, righteousness, and truth through self-effort. Remain in Christ, and these fruits will emerge organically through His life in you.

Fifth, learn what pleases Him. Immerse yourself in Scripture. Saturate yourself in prayer. Surround yourself with wise counsel. Test choices and learn from experience. Develop discernment.

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Sixth, expect resistance. John 3:19-20 warns, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

Light exposes. Light reveals. Light makes people uncomfortable when they're hiding in darkness. Your walk as light will provoke responses—some positive, some negative. Expect it. Don't be surprised. Don't let it silence you.

Seventh, give glory to God. When people notice the change in you, when they comment on the fruit in your life, when they're drawn to the light—point them to the Source. Make sure God gets the glory for what He's done and continues to do in you.

Eighth, be patient with the process. You're learning. Growing. Developing. Some days you'll walk well. Some days you'll stumble. Some days you'll forget you're light and act like darkness. And that's when you return to the truth: "I am light in the Lord. That stumble doesn't change my identity. I return to walking as who I am."

The Christian life isn't perfection. It's direction. It's not flawless living. It's faithful walking. It's not arriving. It's progressing—from glory to glory, from one degree of light to greater light.

You were darkness. But now you are light in the Lord. Therefore—because of who you've become, not to become who you're not—walk as children of light.

Let your life manifest the glory of the One who called you out of darkness. Let your conduct express the identity He's given you. Let your daily choices reflect the nature He's created in you.

You are light. Walk as light. Bear the fruit of light. Learn what pleases the Light. And watch as your life glorifies the Father who transformed darkness into light.

This is the worthy walk. This is the manifested glory. This is what it means to be fully alive as a child of light in a dark world.

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Shine.

"For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." — Ephesians 5:8 (NASB)

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CHAPTER 9

Living Epistles—Visible Glory

"You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."— 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NASB)

Here's an uncomfortable truth most of us would rather avoid: you are the only Bible some people will ever read.

Not because they can't access Scripture—it's available everywhere, in every language, at the touch of a screen. But because they're not looking for it. They're not searching bookstores or downloading apps. They're not interested in ancient texts or religious documents.

But they are watching you.

They're reading your life like a letter. Observing your reactions when things go wrong. Noticing how you treat people who can't benefit you. Watching how you respond to disappointment, betrayal, stress, success. Listening to what you say when you think no one important is listening. Observing whether your private life matches your public persona.

They're reading. Every day. Whether you realize it or not. Whether you like it or not. Whether you're ready or not.

And what they read in you is forming their opinion about the Jesus you claim to follow.

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This is terrifying and magnificent at the same time. Terrifying because the weight feels crushing—what if they read the wrong message? What if my life misrepresents Christ? What if my failures discredit the gospel?

But magnificent because it means you're not just living your life. You're writing a letter. Not with ink and paper, but with choices and character. Not on tablets of stone, but on the tablet of your heart. Not through your own cleverness, but through the Spirit's inscription.

You are a living epistle. A readable gospel. A visible manifestation of invisible glory. Not because you're impressive, but because the Spirit is writing something in you that others can read.

This is the next level of glory manifestation: not just being transformed, but becoming a testimony. Not just walking as light, but being a letter that communicates truth to those who are watching, reading, and trying to figure out if this Jesus thing is real.

The Readable Gospel

Paul's metaphor is striking: you are a letter. Not you're writing a letter. Not you're delivering a letter. You *are* a letter.

Your life is the message. Your character is the content. Your choices are the sentences. Your responses are the punctuation. Your relationships are the paragraphs. And people are reading.

Known and Read by All Men

Paul says this letter is "known and read by all men." Not just by Christians. Not just by people who already believe. By all men. Everyone who encounters you is reading something.

Your coworkers are reading. Your neighbors are reading. Your family is reading. The checkout clerk at the grocery store is reading. The person you cut off in traffic is reading. Your kids are reading with special attention—they know if the private you matches the public you.

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And here's what they're trying to figure out: Is this Christianity real? Does faith actually make a difference? Is transformation possible, or is it just religious performance? Does following Jesus produce something genuine, or is it all talk?

They're not asking these questions consciously. They're not conducting formal investigations. But they're reading. Observing. Drawing conclusions. Forming opinions about Jesus based on what they read in you.

This is both the glory and the burden of being Christ's representative. You're not just living for yourself. You're not just pursuing your own spiritual growth. You're writing a letter that others will read, and that letter communicates something about the Author.

Example to All Believers

But it's not just unbelievers who are reading. Other Christians are reading too.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 says of the Thessalonian believers: "so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

An example. A pattern. A model that others look to and learn from. Their faith "sounded forth"—it made noise, it was noticed, it couldn't be ignored. Their testimony spread beyond their immediate circle so effectively that Paul didn't even need to tell their story—everyone already knew it.

This is the power of a readable gospel. When your life genuinely displays transformation, it doesn't need marketing. When your faith produces visible fruit, it advertises itself. When your walk matches your talk, people notice.

Younger Christians watch older Christians to learn how faith works in practice. New believers observe mature believers to see what sustained discipleship looks like. Struggling believers look to steady believers to find hope that transformation is possible.

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You're writing a letter they're reading. Not to put pressure on you, but to remind you: your life matters beyond yourself. Your faithfulness has ripple effects you'll never fully see. Your authenticity gives others permission to be authentic. Your struggle acknowledged honestly gives others courage in their struggles.

The Pressure and the Freedom

But let's be honest: this feels like crushing pressure.

What if I mess up? What if I have a bad day? What if someone sees me at my worst? What if my letter contains typos, grammatical errors, or entire paragraphs that misrepresent Christ?

Here's the freedom: you're not writing this letter. The Spirit is.

You're not the author. You're the paper. You're not the composer. You're the instrument. You're not the source. You're the vessel.

This removes the pressure of perfection while maintaining the call to authenticity. You don't have to write a perfect letter. But you do have to let the Spirit write through you. You don't have to be a flawless representative. But you do have to be a surrendered one.

The letter will have rough edges. The message will sometimes be messy. The handwriting won't always be clear. But if the Spirit is the Author, the essential message will get through despite your imperfections.

This is grace. You're responsible for surrender, not perfection. For availability, not flawlessness. For authenticity, not performance.

Written by the Spirit

Now we come to the heart of the matter: this letter isn't self-authored. It's Spirit-inscribed.

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"being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Not Ink, But Spirit

The contrast is crucial. Ink is external. Spirit is internal. Ink sits on the surface. Spirit penetrates to the depths. Ink fades with time. Spirit's inscription is permanent. Ink can be washed away. Spirit's writing is indelible.

When the Spirit writes on your heart, He's not just changing your behavior. He's transforming your nature. Not just modifying your actions. Altering your desires. Not just improving your performance. Renovating your heart.

This is why genuine transformation looks different from religious performance. Performance is ink—surface-level, external compliance that can be scrubbed off when inconvenient. But Spirit-inscription goes deep—heart-level change that can't be faked or removed.

Not Stone, But Hearts

The second contrast is equally important: "not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

This references the Old Covenant—the law written on stone tablets. External. Hard. Unchangeable. And ultimately unkeepable because stone tablets couldn't change stone hearts.

But the New Covenant is different. Ezekiel 36:26-27 prophesied: "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

Notice the progression:

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- New heart given
- New spirit placed within
- Heart of stone removed
- Heart of flesh provided
- Spirit placed within
- Caused to walk in obedience

This is internal transformation. The Spirit doesn't just give you new rules to follow. He gives you a new heart that *wants* to follow. He doesn't just command obedience. He creates the internal motivation for obedience. He doesn't just demand change. He produces the change from the inside out.

When people read your life—when they observe your reactions, your choices, your responses—what they're seeing isn't your self-generated morality. It's the Spirit's inscription on your heart becoming visible in your life.

The letter they're reading was written by the Spirit. You're the paper He wrote on. And the message is Christ, not you.

The Inscription Process

But how does the Spirit write? How does this inscription happen?

Through the Word. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." As you read Scripture, the Spirit uses it to inscribe truth on your heart. Not just information memorized, but truth absorbed, believed, lived.

Through conviction. John 16:8 says the Spirit "will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." The Spirit points out what needs to change, what needs to die, what needs to be surrendered. This conviction isn't condemnation. It's the Spirit's editorial work, showing you where the letter needs correction.

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Through transformation. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says we're "being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." The Spirit progressively changes you from the inside out. Not overnight. Not without your cooperation. But certainly, progressively, inevitably.

Through sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 prays, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." The Spirit is making you holy—not just declaring you holy positionally (though that's true), but making you holy practically, progressively, thoroughly.

This is the Spirit's writing process. And it never stops. As long as you're alive, the Spirit is writing, editing, refining, clarifying the letter that is your life.

Cooperation Required

But notice Paul's phrase: "cared for by us." The letter is written by the Spirit, but Paul and his team had a role. They "cared for" these believers. They nurtured. They taught. They encouraged. They corrected. They invested.

The Spirit writes, but He uses means. He uses teachers, pastors, mentors, friends, community. He uses circumstances, trials, blessings, disappointments. He uses Scripture, prayer, worship, communion.

Your job isn't to write the letter—you can't. But your job is to position yourself where the Spirit can write. To surrender to the inscription process. To remain soft and pliable instead of hard and resistant. To let the pen of the Spirit move across the tablet of your heart without fighting the pressure.

Some days the inscription hurts. The pen of conviction presses hard. The editing process cuts deep. The rewrites feel like starting over. And you must choose: will I resist this, or will I surrender to the Spirit's authorship?

The letter being written in you is His work. But it requires your cooperation. Your surrender. Your willingness to be written on rather than fighting the pen.

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The Watching World

Now we need to address a sobering reality: the world is watching. And they're not neutral observers. They're skeptics. Critics. People who've been hurt by the church, disappointed by Christians, confused by contradiction between words and actions.

They're watching to see if this Christianity thing is real or just another religious facade.

Love as the Signature

Jesus gave one unmistakable test: John 13:35 records His words: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Not by your doctrine (though that matters). Not by your spiritual gifts (though those are real). Not by your programs (though they can be useful). Not by your buildings (though you need places to gather). Not by your social media presence (though you can use platforms).

By your love. For one another.

This is the signature at the bottom of the letter. This is what authenticates the message. This is what proves the letter is genuine, not forged.

And notice who's watching: "all men." The world is paying attention. They're looking for evidence that this Jesus transforms people into something genuinely different. And the evidence they're looking for is love.

Not sentimentality. Not tolerance. Not agreement with everything. Love—genuine, sacrificial, patient, kind love. Love that forgives. Love that serves. Love that perseveres. Love that believes the best. Love that hopes. Love that endures (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

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When the world sees Christians loving each other—really loving, not just pretending—they see evidence that Jesus is real. When they see Christians serving each other, forgiving each other, bearing with each other, sacrificing for each other—they see a love that doesn't make sense in worldly terms.

And that love becomes a testimony more powerful than any sermon you could preach.

The Community Testimony

But notice the context: "love for one another." This is community love. Church love. Family-of-God love.

William Temple captured this beautifully: "The church is the only organization in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members."

The church doesn't exist primarily for its own benefit. It exists as a testimony to the world. As a light in darkness. As a letter being read. And the most powerful testimony the church can give is Christians genuinely loving each other.

This is why church conflict is so damaging. Why division is so destructive. Why gossip is so devastating. Why unforgiveness between believers is so scandalous. Because the world is reading. And when they see Christians treating each other the same way the world treats people—with criticism, judgment, division, hostility—they conclude: "Christianity doesn't work. It's no different. It's just religious pretense."

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But when they see Christians:

- Forgiving each other when wronged
- Serving each other without expecting return
- Bearing each other's burdens without complaining
- Speaking truth in love even when it's difficult
- Celebrating each other's victories without jealousy
- Mourning each other's losses without rushing to fix
- Standing together despite differences
- Pursuing unity even when it's costly

They see something that can't be explained by natural means. They encounter love that only makes sense if Jesus is real and the Spirit is actually transforming people.

This is the readable gospel. This is the visible glory. Not individual impressiveness, but corporate love.

Beyond the Church Walls

But the watching world isn't just observing how we treat each other in church. They're watching how we treat them. How we interact with the skeptic. How we respond to the critic. How we engage with the hostile. How we serve the needy. How we love the unlovable.

Matthew 5:46-47 challenges: "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

The world loves those who love them back. The world serves those who can return the favor. The world is kind to those who are kind first. There's nothing supernatural about that.

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But when Christians love enemies? When we serve those who can't repay? When we forgive those who don't deserve it? When we show kindness to those who are hostile? That's supernatural. That's evidence of divine transformation. That's the Spirit's inscription becoming visible.

The world is watching how you treat:

- The difficult coworker
- The rude driver
- The incompetent service worker
- The political opponent
- The theological adversary
- The person who wronged you
- The family member who doesn't believe
- The neighbor who annoys you

And what they see in those moments—when you're stressed, when you're provoked, when you're tired, when you have every right to retaliate—that's what they're reading. That's the letter that convinces or contradicts.

Authentic Witness vs. Performance

But here we must distinguish between authentic witness and religious performance. Because the world is increasingly skilled at detecting the difference.

Deed and Truth, Not Word and Tongue

1 John 3:18 commands: "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

Not just words. Not just religious language. Not just correct theology articulated eloquently. Deed and truth. Action and reality. Love demonstrated, not just declared.

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The world has heard enough Christian words. They've heard the sermons. They've seen the bumper stickers. They've read the social media posts. They've been told about Jesus.

What they're hungry for is evidence. Proof. Reality. Christians who actually live what they claim to believe. Love expressed in concrete action, not just abstract declaration.

This is why hypocrisy is so devastating to Christian witness. When your words say one thing but your actions say another, people read the actions and dismiss the words. When you claim to follow Jesus on Sunday but live like the world Monday through Saturday, they conclude Jesus doesn't actually make a difference.

But when your life backs up your words—when your actions validate your claims—the world pays attention. Not because you're perfect, but because you're authentic. Not because you've arrived, but because you're genuinely being transformed.

Messy Authenticity vs. Polished Performance

Here's what the world needs to see more of: messy authenticity. Honest Christians who admit they're broken but being healed. Transparent believers who acknowledge their struggles while celebrating God's faithfulness through them. Real people with real problems experiencing real transformation by a real God.

What the world is tired of: polished performance. Christians who pretend to have it all together. Believers who hide their struggles behind religious language. Perfect personas that feel false because they are false.

The world can spot fake. They've seen enough religious performance to develop sophisticated fake-detectors. But authentic transformation—even when it's messy, incomplete, in-progress—resonates as real.

This is why Paul could write: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). The vessel is obviously weak, flawed, broken. That's not hidden. That's acknowledged. But the treasure inside is real, powerful, transformative.

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You don't have to pretend you're perfect to be an effective witness. You have to be authentic about your imperfection while pointing to the Perfect One who's transforming you.

The letter people are reading doesn't need to be flawless. It needs to be honest. The message doesn't need to be polished. It needs to be real. The testimony doesn't need to be impressive. It needs to be true.

When the Letter Contains Errors

But what about when you fail? When you sin? When the letter contains obvious errors, mistakes, contradictions? When your life writes something you wish it hadn't?

Here's where authentic witness shines brightest: in honest repentance. In genuine confession. In humble acknowledgment of failure followed by real change.

The world doesn't expect perfection. They expect hypocrisy—claiming perfection while failing privately. But when a Christian sins publicly, confesses honestly, seeks forgiveness genuinely, makes restitution where possible, and demonstrates real change—that's powerful testimony.

Because it shows:

- Christianity isn't about pretending to be perfect
- Transformation is real but progressive
- Grace covers genuine failure
- Repentance produces real change
- The gospel works for real people with real problems

Your failures don't disqualify your testimony if you handle them with authentic repentance. In fact, how you handle failure might be more powerful testimony than your successes. Because it demonstrates that Christianity isn't performance religion—it's transformation relationship.

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The letter might contain errors. The Spirit's inscription might be messy in places. The message might have rough edges. But if the overall trajectory is toward Christ, if the general direction is toward holiness, if the pattern is increasing conformity to His image—people will read transformation, not perfection. And transformation is what they're looking for.

Writing a Readable Letter

So how do you live as a readable gospel? How do you let the Spirit write a letter in you that draws people to Christ rather than pushes them away?

First, remember you're being read. Not to create performance pressure, but to create intentionality. You're writing a letter with your life. What message are you communicating?

Second, surrender to the Spirit's authorship. Stop trying to write your own story. Stop managing your image. Stop controlling the narrative. Let the Spirit write what He wants to write, even when it's uncomfortable, even when it exposes weakness, even when it requires change you'd rather avoid.

Third, prioritize love above everything. If you have to choose between being right and being loving, choose loving. If you have to choose between winning an argument and maintaining relationship, choose relationship. Love is the signature that authenticates the letter.

Fourth, be authentic, not perfect. Drop the pretense. Stop hiding the struggles. Admit the failures. Acknowledge the process. The world respects honesty even when they disagree with theology. But they despise hypocrisy regardless of how correct your doctrine is.

Fifth, let your actions speak louder than your words. Live what you claim to believe. Let your deed validate your word. Let your truth be demonstrated, not just declared.

Sixth, stay in community. You can't write this letter alone. You need other believers to shape you, sharpen you, encourage you, correct you, love you. The letter is strongest when it's written in community, not in isolation.

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Seventh, embrace the mess. The letter won't be perfect. The message won't always be clear. The handwriting will sometimes be sloppy. But if the Spirit is the Author, the essential message will get through. Trust the process.

Eighth, repent quickly when you fail. Don't hide sin. Don't excuse failure. Don't justify mistakes. Acknowledge them. Confess them. Seek forgiveness. Make amends. Move forward. Honest repentance is powerful testimony.

The world is reading. They're watching. They're forming conclusions about Jesus based on what they read in you. Not just you individually, but the collective letter of the church community you're part of.

This is sobering. But it's also magnificent. Because you get to participate in communicating the most important message in the world. Not through impressive arguments or clever presentations, but through a transformed life that demonstrates Jesus is real, grace is powerful, and the Spirit is actively writing redemption stories in broken people.

You are a letter of Christ. Written not with ink, but with the Spirit. Not on stone, but on hearts. Known and read by all.

Let the Spirit write. Let love be the signature. Let authenticity be the tone. Let transformation be the message.

And trust that as the Spirit writes in you, others will read and encounter the One who transforms darkness into light, stone hearts into flesh, and broken people into living testimonies of His glory.

You are a living epistle. Make it readable. Make it authentic. Make it point to Christ.

The world is watching. And they're hungry for evidence that transformation is real.

Be that evidence.

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"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." — 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NASB)

CHAPTER 10

Ambassadors of Glory—Representing the Kingdom

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." — 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NASB)

You hold one of the most prestigious positions in the universe.

Not because of your credentials. Not because of your qualifications. Not because you earned it or deserved it. But because the King of the universe has appointed you as His personal representative to a world in rebellion against Him.

This is what an ambassador is: an official representative of a sovereign authority in foreign territory. Someone who speaks with the authority of the one who sent them. Someone who represents interests beyond their own. Someone whose primary loyalty isn't to the place they're stationed, but to the kingdom they represent.

And Paul says: this is you. You are an ambassador for Christ. Not might become one. Not could be one if you get more training. You *are* one. Right now. In your current location. With your current limitations. In your current circumstances.

This is simultaneously the highest honor and the weightiest responsibility imaginable. Higher than any earthly title. More significant than any worldly position. More important than any career achievement.

Because you represent the King of Kings. You speak on behalf of the Lord of Lords. You carry the message of the Creator to His creation. You stand as Christ's personal representative in hostile territory, bearing news of reconciliation to rebels who don't yet know they can come home.

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But let's be honest: most days, you probably don't feel like an ambassador. You feel more like a fraud, a failure, or at best, a flawed messenger with a message you sometimes struggle to believe yourself. You wonder how God could use someone so obviously inadequate to represent Someone so infinitely perfect.

And that's exactly the point. God specializes in using weak ambassadors. Because when obviously inadequate people carry an infinitely powerful message with supernatural results, there's no question about where the power comes from.

You are an ambassador for Christ. Not because you're impressive, but because you've been commissioned. Not because you're qualified, but because you've been sent. Not because you're strong, but because the One you represent is infinitely strong.

This is the final dimension of glory manifestation we'll explore in this section: not just being transformed (vessels of glory), not just living transformed (children of light), not just displaying transformation (living epistles), but actively representing the One who transformed you—carrying His message, speaking His words, extending His invitation to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

The Ambassador's Commission

Let's start by understanding what an ambassador actually is and does. Because the biblical concept is far more profound than we usually realize.

Representing Another's Interests

In the ancient world—and still today—an ambassador is someone who represents a sovereign authority in foreign territory. When an ambassador speaks, they're not expressing personal opinions. They're communicating their sovereign's official position. When an ambassador acts, they're not pursuing personal agendas. They're advancing their kingdom's interests.

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An ambassador's authority comes not from themselves but from the one who sent them. Their power derives not from personal impressiveness but from official appointment. Their message matters not because of eloquence but because of source.

This is crucial: as Christ's ambassador, you don't represent yourself. You represent Him. You don't promote your own agenda. You advance His kingdom. You don't speak your own words. You communicate His message.

This simultaneously removes pressure and increases responsibility. Removes pressure because the success doesn't depend on your charisma, your intelligence, your eloquence, or your abilities. The message has power because of its Source, not its messenger. But increases responsibility because you must accurately represent the One who sent you. You must faithfully communicate His message, not distort it with your own additions or deletions.

An Ambassador in Chains

Paul understood this role profoundly. Writing from prison, he described himself in Ephesians 6:20: "for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

An ambassador in chains. Think about that image. Imprisoned. Restricted. Limited. Suffering. Yet still functioning as an ambassador. Still representing Christ. Still speaking the message. Still advancing the kingdom.

Circumstances didn't change Paul's identity. Suffering didn't revoke his commission. Imprisonment didn't cancel his ambassadorship. He remained Christ's representative even when it cost him freedom, comfort, and eventually his life.

This teaches us something critical: your ambassadorship isn't contingent on ideal circumstances. You don't cease to be Christ's representative when life gets hard. You don't lose your commission when you face opposition. You don't surrender your role when representing Christ becomes costly.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Paul could have said, "I used to be an ambassador, but now I'm just a prisoner." Instead, he said, "I am an ambassador—who happens to be in chains right now."

Your identity as Christ's ambassador transcends your circumstances. Whether you're healthy or sick, employed or unemployed, respected or rejected, comfortable or suffering—you remain His representative. The commission doesn't expire when conditions deteriorate.

Authority and Humility

But here's the paradox of ambassadorship: it requires both authority and humility. Both boldness and brokenness. Both confidence and confession of weakness.

Authority because you speak for the King. When you proclaim the gospel, you're not offering suggestions or personal opinions. You're declaring objective truth with divine authority. When you extend Christ's invitation, you're not tentatively hoping people might consider it. You're authoritatively announcing the King's decree: "Be reconciled to God."

But humility because you're just a messenger. You're not the King—you represent the King. You're not the Savior—you point to the Savior. You're not the power source—you're the conduit. And you're an obviously flawed conduit at that.

This combination of authority and humility creates a unique posture. You speak boldly because you represent the King. But you speak humbly because you're a broken vessel carrying treasure you don't deserve.

You declare truth without apology. But you acknowledge your own ongoing need for that same truth. You extend Christ's invitation with confidence. But you remember you're a beggar telling other beggars where to find bread.

This is what it means to be an ambassador in chains—speaking with authority derived from the King while acknowledging the weakness inherent in the messenger.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Not Our Agenda, But His

But perhaps the most challenging aspect of ambassadorship is this: you represent His interests, not your own.

An ambassador can't change the message to make it more popular. Can't adjust the terms to make them more acceptable. Can't soften the demands to make them more palatable. Can't add conditions that the King didn't specify or remove conditions that He did.

The ambassador's job is faithful representation, not creative adaptation. Accurate communication, not strategic modification. Proclaiming what the King said, not what you wish He'd said.

This becomes difficult when the King's message is unpopular. When the terms of reconciliation offend modern sensibilities. When the gospel's exclusivity contradicts pluralistic assumptions. When Christ's lordship challenges autonomous individualism.

You'll be tempted to adjust the message. To smooth the rough edges. To make the gospel more marketable, more acceptable, more aligned with contemporary values. But that's not an ambassador's role. That's betrayal of your commission.

Your job is to faithfully represent what Christ said, not make it easier to swallow. To accurately communicate His terms, not negotiate better ones. To extend His invitation as given, not revise it to increase acceptance rates.

This will cost you. Faithful ambassadors are often unpopular. Accurate representatives face opposition. Those who refuse to compromise the message pay a price—just ask Paul, the ambassador in chains.

But you're not an ambassador for applause. You're an ambassador for Christ. And He's looking for faithful representatives, not popular ones.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Ministry of Reconciliation

But what exactly is the message ambassadors carry? What are we commissioned to communicate? Paul tells us explicitly in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19:

"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

The message is reconciliation. Relationship restored. Enmity ended. Peace established. Rebels welcomed home.

The Broken Relationship

To understand reconciliation, you must first understand the breach. Humanity isn't just lost—we're rebels. Not just mistaken—enemies. Not just separated from God—hostile toward God.

Romans 5:10 describes us as "enemies" of God. Not neutral. Not indifferent. Enemies. Actively opposed. In rebellion. Hostile.

Colossians 1:21 adds: "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." Alienated. Hostile. Engaged in evil. This was your condition. This is humanity's default state.

The relationship is broken. Not because God moved—He never does. But because we moved. We rebelled. We chose autonomy over relationship, self-rule over God's rule, our way over His way.

And this broken relationship has consequences: separation, death, judgment, wrath. Not because God is vindictive, but because sin inherently separates, death is sin's wages, judgment is justice, and wrath is God's righteous response to rebellion.

This is the bad news. The problem. The breach that needs healing. The relationship that needs reconciling.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

God's Initiative

But here's the glory of the gospel: reconciliation was God's idea, not ours. God's initiative, not our achievement. God's work, not our accomplishment.

"God...reconciled us to Himself through Christ." Not "we reconciled ourselves to God through our efforts." Not "we worked hard enough to earn our way back." Not "we figured out how to bridge the gap."

God reconciled us. God closed the gap. God paid the price. God did what we couldn't do.

And how? "Through Christ." Through His life, His death, His resurrection. Through His perfect obedience, His substitutionary sacrifice, His victorious triumph over sin and death.

Christ is the Reconciler. The Mediator. The Bridge. The Peace-Maker. The One who restores what was broken, heals what was wounded, resurrects what was dead.

This is the heart of the message we carry: reconciliation is possible because God made it possible. Peace with God is available because Christ secured it. The way home is open because Jesus is the way.

Not Counting Trespasses

But notice the mechanism: "not counting their trespasses against them."

This is scandalous. Revolutionary. Almost too good to be true. God isn't counting trespasses. Isn't tallying sins. Isn't keeping score. Isn't holding grudges.

Not because sin doesn't matter—it does. Not because justice doesn't require payment—it does. But because Christ paid. Because Jesus bore the trespasses. Because the Son absorbed the wrath. Because the punishment fell on Him instead of us.

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2 Corinthians 5:21 explains: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The Great Exchange: Christ takes our sin. We receive His righteousness. Christ bears our guilt. We receive His innocence. Christ suffers our punishment. We receive His reward.

And because Christ paid fully, God doesn't count our trespasses against us. Not because He's overlooking them. Because they've been dealt with. Atoned for. Paid in full. Nailed to the cross. Buried in the tomb. Left behind in the resurrection.

This is the message: trespasses aren't being counted. Not because God lowered the standard. Because Christ met the standard on our behalf.

The Invitation Extended

And now—this is where ambassadorship comes in—God has "committed to us the word of reconciliation."

He's entrusted the message to us. Commissioned us to carry it. Appointed us to extend His invitation. Made us His ambassadors bearing His offer: "Be reconciled to God."

This is your message. Your commission. Your ambassadorial duty: to tell people the relationship can be restored. To announce that the way home is open. To proclaim that peace with God is possible. To extend the invitation: come home, the Father is waiting.

You don't make reconciliation possible—Christ did that. You don't provide the way—Jesus is the way. You don't pay the price—it's already paid. Your job is to announce it. Proclaim it. Extend the invitation. Say what God has commissioned you to say: "Be reconciled to God."

This is the ministry every Christian has been given. Not just pastors. Not just evangelists. Not just missionaries. Every believer is a minister of reconciliation, an ambassador bearing this message.

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And what a message it is. Not "try harder." Not "be better." Not "earn your way." But "Come home. The price is paid. The way is open. The Father is waiting. Be reconciled."

Speaking for the King

But how do we do this? How do we speak with authority when we feel so inadequate? How do we represent the King when we're so obviously flawed?

Not You, But the Spirit

Jesus anticipated this anxiety. In Matthew 10:19-20, He told His disciples: "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."

Read that carefully. "It is not you who speak, but...the Spirit."

You're not the source of the message. You're not generating the words through your own cleverness. You're not inventing the content through your own wisdom. The Spirit is speaking through you.

This doesn't mean you don't prepare. It doesn't mean you don't study. It doesn't mean you're passive. But it does mean that when you speak as Christ's ambassador, you're not alone. The Spirit is active. Working. Speaking. Empowering.

This should simultaneously relieve anxiety and increase faithfulness. Relieve anxiety because the burden isn't entirely on you—the Spirit is working. Increase faithfulness because if the Spirit is speaking, you'd better make sure you're accurately representing what He's saying, not distorting it with your own additions.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

God's Strength in Your Weakness

But here's what J. Hudson Taylor understood after years of missionary work: "God does not need your strength: He has more than enough of power of His own. He asks your weakness: He has none of that Himself, and He is longing to give you His strength."

Read that again. God doesn't need your strength. He has infinite power. What He asks for is your weakness. Your inadequacy. Your insufficiency. Because He has none of that, and He wants to display His strength through your obvious weakness.

This inverts everything we naturally think. We assume God wants us to be strong, competent, impressive so we can effectively represent Him. But God wants us to be weak, dependent, broken so His strength can be clearly seen.

When strong people do strong things, observers are impressed by the people. When weak people do strong things, observers marvel at the power source. When obviously inadequate ambassadors faithfully represent the King and people respond to the message, there's no question about where the power came from.

Paul learned this through personal experience. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, he records: "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Power perfected in weakness. Strength displayed through insufficiency. Divine authority expressed through human inadequacy.

This is how ambassadorship works. You speak for the King not because you're eloquent, but because you're commissioned. You represent Christ not because you're impressive, but because you're sent. You extend the invitation not because you're qualified, but because the Spirit empowers.

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Boldness in Brokenness

But notice: this doesn't produce timidity. Paul asks for prayer in Ephesians 6:19-20: "and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

Boldness. Even in chains. Even in weakness. Even in obvious inadequacy. Boldness.

Because ambassadors speak with the King's authority, even when the messenger is weak. The message has power even when the messenger doesn't. The invitation carries weight even when the ambassador is in chains.

This is the paradox: broken boldness. Humble confidence. Weak authority. You speak boldly because you represent the King. But you remain humble because you're just the messenger. You proclaim with confidence because the message is true. But you acknowledge weakness because you're an earthen vessel.

This combination is powerful. The world respects authenticity. They're drawn to people who speak truth boldly while admitting their own ongoing struggle with that truth. They're attracted to ambassadors who declare the King's message with authority while acknowledging their personal need for that same message.

You don't have to be perfect to be an effective ambassador. You have to be faithful. You don't have to be impressive. You have to be available. You don't have to be strong. You have to be surrendered.

The Authority of the Sent

But never forget: you do speak with authority. Not self-generated authority. Not authority earned through achievement. But delegated authority. Authority that comes from being sent.

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When a Roman soldier told Jesus, "just say the word, and my servant will be healed," he explained his confidence: "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes" (Matthew 8:8-9).

The soldier understood delegated authority. He had authority over his soldiers not because he was personally powerful, but because Rome stood behind him. When he spoke, Rome spoke. When he commanded, Rome commanded.

You have authority as Christ's ambassador not because you're personally impressive, but because Christ stands behind you. When you speak His message, He speaks. When you extend His invitation, He invites. When you proclaim His truth, He proclaims.

This is the authority of the sent. Not self-authority. Delegated authority. The King's authority operating through His commissioned representative.

Speak boldly. Not arrogantly. Not rudely. Not insensitively. But boldly. Because you don't speak for yourself. You speak for the King. And the King's message deserves to be delivered with the confidence it warrants.

Citizens of Heaven Living on Earth

But there's one more dimension of ambassadorship we need to explore: the peculiar position of living in foreign territory while representing another kingdom.

Dual Citizenship

Philippians 3:20 declares: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Your citizenship is in heaven. Not was. Not will be. *Is*. Present tense. Current reality. Right now, while you live on earth, your citizenship is in heaven.

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This creates a unique position. You live in one kingdom while belonging to another. You reside in one nation while owing allegiance to another. You're physically present in one realm while spiritually identified with another.

This is what ambassadors do. They live in foreign territory while representing their home nation. They function in one culture while maintaining loyalty to another. They're physically present in one place while their allegiance remains elsewhere.

You are a citizen of heaven stationed temporarily on earth. A representative of Christ's kingdom embedded in a fallen world. An agent of heaven working in earthly contexts.

Strangers and Exiles

Peter describes this position in 1 Peter 2:11: "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."

Aliens. Strangers. Not at home. Not permanent residents. Temporary sojourners passing through foreign territory.

Hebrews 11:13 says of the patriarchs: "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

Strangers and exiles. This is your position. You live on earth but you don't belong to earth. You function in the world but you're not of the world. You're physically present but spiritually distinct.

This should affect how you live. How you think. What you value. Where you invest. What you pursue. What you protect.

Ambassadors don't put down roots in foreign territory. They don't get too comfortable. They don't forget where home is. They maintain distinct identity even while living among people who don't share that identity.

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Living Differently

But this doesn't mean isolation or irrelevance. Ambassadors don't withdraw from the culture they're stationed in. They engage it. But they engage it differently—maintaining distinct values, different priorities, alternative allegiances.

Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:15-16: "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

In the world. Not of the world. Present but distinct. Engaged but different. Involved but separate.

This creates tension. Healthy tension. The tension of being in the world but not of it. The tension of living in foreign territory while representing another kingdom. The tension of functioning in earthly contexts while maintaining heavenly citizenship.

You work earthly jobs. But with heavenly motivation. You engage earthly relationships. But with eternal perspective. You participate in earthly systems. But with kingdom values. You live in earthly locations. But as heaven's representative.

This dual citizenship means you're never fully at home on earth. There's always an ache, a longing, a sense that you belong somewhere else. You're homesick for a home you've never physically seen. You long for a kingdom you've only tasted, not fully experienced.

And that longing is good. That homesickness is healthy. That sense of not-quite-belonging reminds you: you're an ambassador, not a permanent resident. A representative, not a citizen. A temporary sojourner, not an eternal inhabitant.

Longing for Home

Philippians 3:20 continues: "from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

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Eagerly wait. Actively anticipate. Longingly expect. Your eyes are on the horizon, watching for the King's return. Your heart is oriented toward home, anticipating the day when ambassadors are recalled and citizens return to their true kingdom.

This doesn't make you useless on earth. It makes you effective. Because people who know they're temporary sojourners don't get trapped by earthly entanglements. They don't accumulate what they can't take with them. They don't invest in what won't last. They hold earthly things loosely and heavenly things tightly.

And paradoxically, this makes them better earthly citizens. Not because they're fully invested in earthly kingdoms, but because they bring heavenly values to earthly contexts. They represent kingdom priorities in worldly systems. They demonstrate what it looks like when citizens of heaven function as salt and light on earth.

C.S. Lewis captured this perfectly: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."

You do the most good on earth when you remember you're a citizen of heaven. You represent Christ most effectively when you maintain ambassadorial distance from the world system. You impact culture most profoundly when you refuse to be conformed to culture.

Living as Ambassadors

So how do you actually live as Christ's ambassador? How do you fulfill this commission in daily life?

First, remember your position. You are an ambassador. Not trying to become one. Not hoping to earn the title. You are one. Christ commissioned you. The King appointed you. The title is official. Live accordingly.

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Second, represent His interests, not yours. When you speak, ask: "What does Christ want said?" When you act, ask: "What does the King want done?" When you engage culture, ask: "How does heaven want represented?" Let His agenda drive your actions, not your personal preferences.

Third, faithfully communicate the message. Don't adjust it. Don't water it down. Don't add conditions He didn't specify or remove ones He did. Proclaim reconciliation—all of it. The bad news of sin. The good news of grace. The requirement of repentance. The gift of faith. The call to surrender. All of it.

Fourth, depend on the Spirit. You're not generating the message. The Spirit speaks through you. You're not producing the results. The Spirit convicts hearts. You're not converting anyone. The Spirit regenerates. Your job is faithful representation; the Spirit's job is powerful transformation.

Fifth, embrace weakness. Stop trying to be impressive. Stop hiding inadequacy. Stop pretending you have it all together. Your weakness is the platform for His strength. Your insufficiency is the canvas for His sufficiency. Embrace it. Boast in it. Let His power be perfected through it.

Sixth, speak boldly. You represent the King. The message matters. The invitation is urgent. Lives hang in the balance. Speak up. Speak out. Speak boldly. Not rudely. Not arrogantly. But confidently, clearly, courageously.

Seventh, maintain dual citizenship. Live in the world without being of the world. Engage culture without being absorbed by culture. Function in earthly systems while maintaining heavenly allegiance. Let your citizenship show. Let your loyalty be visible. Let your distinct values be obvious.

Eighth, watch for the King's return. Don't get too comfortable here. Don't sink roots too deep. Don't forget this is temporary assignment, not permanent residence. Keep your eyes on the horizon. Watch for Christ's return. Eagerly anticipate the day ambassadors are recalled home.

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Ninth, love the people you're sent to. Ambassadors aren't superior to the people they're stationed among. They're servants. Representatives who genuinely care about the people in foreign territory. Love them. Serve them. Invest in them. Not because you're better, but because you bear a message they desperately need.

Tenth, remember the privilege. You represent the King of Kings. You speak for the Lord of Lords. You carry the most important message in history. This is privilege beyond measure. Don't take it lightly. Don't treat it casually. Honor the commission you've been given.

You are an ambassador for Christ. Not because you're worthy, but because you're called. Not because you're qualified, but because you're commissioned. Not because you're impressive, but because the One you represent is infinitely glorious.

And the world needs to hear the message you carry. They need to know reconciliation is possible. They need to hear the invitation extended. They need to receive the news that the way home is open, the price is paid, and the Father is waiting.

Be the ambassador. Carry the message. Represent the King. Extend the invitation. Speak with boldness born of commission, not arrogance. Serve with humility born of knowing you're just a messenger, not the Message.

And trust that as you faithfully represent Christ, the Spirit will work. Hearts will respond. Lives will change. Rebels will become reconciled. And the kingdom will advance—not because of your impressiveness, but because of His power working through your surrendered weakness.

The King is looking for faithful ambassadors. Weak messengers willing to carry a powerful message. Broken vessels willing to represent a perfect King. Ordinary people willing to speak extraordinary truth.

Will you be His ambassador? Will you represent His kingdom? Will you extend His invitation?

The world is waiting. The message is urgent. The King has commissioned you.

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Go. Speak. Represent.

You are an ambassador for Christ.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." — Acts 1:8 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

PART FOUR: THE DAILY PRACTICE OF GLORY

Practical Sanctification

CHAPTER 11

Abiding in Glory—The Prerequisite of Presence

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."— John 15:4-5 (NASB)

There's a word that appears eleven times in John 15:1-11. Eleven times in eleven verses. And it's the key to everything we've been discussing about transformation, glory, and bearing fruit that lasts.

The word is *abide*.

Not visit. Not check in with. Not occasionally consult. *Abide*. Remain. Dwell. Stay. Continue. Make your home. Maintain vital, unbroken connection.

This is Jesus's image for the Christian life: a branch abiding in a vine. Not a branch that occasionally touches the vine. Not a branch that visits the vine on Sundays. Not a branch that tries really hard to produce fruit through independent effort.

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A branch that abides. That remains connected. That draws its life, sustenance, nourishment, and power from the vine continuously, constantly, completely.

And here's what Jesus is clear about: without abiding, there's no fruit. Without remaining connected, there's no transformation. Without dwelling in vital union with Christ, there's no manifestation of glory—no matter how hard you try, how many spiritual disciplines you practice, or how sincere your effort.

We've spent ten chapters exploring what it means to be prepared for glory—to be transformed from glory to glory, to walk as light, to live as ambassadors. But all of that—every bit of it—depends on one prerequisite: abiding in Christ.

You can't generate transformation through effort. You can't manufacture fruit through willpower. You can't produce glory through religious activity. These things only happen through abiding. Through remaining in vital, moment-by-moment, breath-by-breath connection with Jesus.

This is both relieving and challenging. Relieving because it removes the burden of self-generated transformation. Challenging because it requires something harder than effort: surrender. Harder than activity: stillness. Harder than doing: being.

Abiding isn't about trying harder. It's about trusting deeper. It's not about doing more. It's about remaining connected. It's not about achieving. It's about receiving.

This is the daily practice of glory: learning to abide. To dwell. To remain. To stay connected to the Vine who is the source of all life, all transformation, all fruit, all glory.

The Abiding Imperative

Jesus doesn't suggest abiding. He commands it. "Abide in Me." This is imperative. Not optional. Not for advanced Christians only. Not for those who have time for deeper spirituality.

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Abiding is the non-negotiable foundation of Christian living. Everything else flows from this. Nothing else works without this.

Not Visiting, But Dwelling

There's a crucial difference between visiting someone and dwelling with them. When you visit, you show up, spend some time, then leave. When you dwell, you make your home there. You don't just appear occasionally—you live there continuously.

Many Christians treat their relationship with Christ like a visitation schedule. They visit Him on Sunday mornings. They check in during morning devotions. They consult Him when facing major decisions. They call on Him in crisis.

But Jesus doesn't call us to visit Him. He calls us to abide in Him. To dwell. To make our home. To live in continuous, unbroken connection.

Psalm 91:1 captures this: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

Notice the parallel: dwelling and abiding. These aren't occasional activities. They're continuous states of being. You don't just visit the shelter occasionally. You dwell there. You don't just pass through the shadow periodically. You abide there.

This is what Jesus is calling you to: continuous dwelling in Him. Not just moments of connection throughout your day, but a state of ongoing, unbroken union. Not just checking in periodically, but living in constant awareness of and dependence on Him.

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The Greek Word: Menō

The word Jesus uses—"abide" (*menō* in Greek)—means to remain, to stay, to continue, to dwell, to endure. It's not about physical location but relational position. It's about maintaining vital connection, staying in union, continuing in relationship.

Jesus isn't talking about geographic proximity. He's talking about spiritual union. About maintaining the connection that makes life flow from the Vine to the branch. About staying in the position where His life becomes your life, His strength becomes your strength, His resources become your resources.

And notice the mutual nature of abiding: "Abide in Me, and I in you." It's not one-sided. You abide in Him—positioning yourself to receive. He abides in you—choosing to dwell, inhabit, make His home in you.

This is the mystery of union with Christ. You're in Him. He's in you. You dwell in Him. He dwells in you. You remain connected to Him. He remains connected to you.

This isn't something you create through effort. This is a reality you enter through faith and maintain through surrender. Christ has already made His home in you (Ephesians 3:17). Your job is to consciously abide in Him—to live in ongoing awareness of and dependence on this union.

Continual, Not Occasional

But here's what we need to understand: abiding isn't an occasional spiritual exercise. It's a continuous state of being. It's not something you do for fifteen minutes in the morning and then forget about. It's a way of living—moment by moment, breath by breath, choice by choice.

Brother Lawrence, in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, described learning to maintain constant awareness of God's presence. Not just during formal prayer times, but while washing dishes, while walking, while working. Continuous dwelling in God's presence.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is abiding. Not achieving moments of connection, but maintaining a state of connection. Not scheduling times with God, but living in continuous communion. Not visiting Christ periodically, but dwelling in Him constantly.

This doesn't mean you're consciously thinking about Jesus every single moment. That would be impossible while driving, working, or having conversations. But it means you're living in a state of ongoing connection, like breathing—you don't consciously think about every breath, but you're continuously breathing.

Abiding means Christ is your default setting, not an occasional add-on. It means you return to awareness of Him naturally throughout your day. It means you make decisions with constant reference to Him. It means you process life through the lens of your union with Him.

The Alternative to Striving

And here's the beautiful part: abiding is the alternative to striving. It's rest, not effort. Receiving, not achieving. Depending, not producing.

Jesus says, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me."

The branch doesn't try to produce fruit. The branch abides. And fruit happens naturally through the life flowing from the vine. The branch's job isn't production. It's position. Not manufacturing. Maintaining connection.

You don't bear fruit by trying harder. You bear fruit by abiding deeper. You don't transform yourself through spiritual disciplines performed in your own strength. You're transformed through maintaining vital connection with Christ, who does the transforming.

This inverts everything we naturally think. We assume spiritual growth requires more effort, more activity, more doing. But Jesus says it requires more abiding, more depending, more receiving.

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The Christian life isn't difficult. It's impossible. Impossible to live through self-effort. Only possible through abiding in Christ and letting His life flow through you.

Union with Christ: The Source of Glory

Now we need to understand the foundation of abiding: your union with Christ. You can abide because you're already in Him. You can dwell because He's already made His home in you. This isn't something you're trying to achieve. It's a reality you're learning to live from.

In Christ Jesus

1 Corinthians 1:30 declares: "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."

"By His doing you are in Christ Jesus." This is God's work, not yours. You didn't achieve this position. You didn't earn this union. God placed you in Christ. This is accomplished fact, not aspiration.

And in Christ, you have everything: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption. Everything you need is found in Him. Everything required for transformation is available in Him. Everything necessary for bearing fruit exists in Him.

This means you're not trying to get something from Christ. You're learning to live from what you already have in Christ. You're not striving to achieve union. You're abiding in the union that's already been established.

The entire New Testament is saturated with "in Christ" language. Paul uses this phrase or variations of it over 160 times. You are:

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- Justified in Christ (Galatians 2:17)
- Sanctified in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- Complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10)
- Alive in Christ (Romans 6:11)
- New creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Blessed in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
- Sealed in Christ (Ephesians 1:13)
- United with Christ (Romans 6:5)

Your identity, your standing, your sufficiency, your life—all of it is "in Christ." Not in yourself. Not in your performance. Not in your spiritual achievements. In Him.

Complete in Him

Colossians 2:10 makes this even more explicit: "and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."

Complete. Not lacking. Not deficient. Not insufficient. Complete in Him.

This is staggering. You're not trying to become complete through spiritual growth. You're already complete in Christ. You're not pursuing wholeness through effort. You're already whole in Him. You're not working toward sufficiency. You're already sufficient in Him.

This doesn't mean you've arrived at perfect maturity. It means you have everything you need for the journey. It doesn't mean you're fully developed. It means the resources for development are fully available in Christ.

Think of it this way: a newborn baby is complete—having everything necessary to be human—but not fully grown. Growth happens by drawing on resources already present, not by adding something externally. The DNA, the life, the potential—it's all there from the beginning. Growth is expression of what's already present, not acquisition of what's missing.

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You are complete in Christ. The life you need is in Him. The power you need flows from Him. The transformation you're experiencing happens through Him. You're not trying to add to your union with Christ. You're learning to live from it.

The Vine-Branch Union

This is why Jesus uses the vine-branch metaphor. A branch doesn't have independent life. A branch has no resources of its own. A branch separated from the vine isn't just weak—it's dead.

But a branch connected to the vine has everything the vine has. The life in the vine is life in the branch. The nutrients in the vine flow to the branch. The sap in the vine nourishes the branch. The strength of the vine sustains the branch.

The branch doesn't contribute anything to the vine. The branch receives everything from the vine. And through receiving, the branch does what branches do: it bears fruit.

This is your relationship with Christ. You don't have independent spiritual life. You have no resources of your own. Separated from Him, you can do nothing (John 15:5).

But connected to Him—abiding in Him—you have access to everything He is and everything He has. His life becomes your life. His strength becomes your strength. His resources become your resources. His righteousness becomes your righteousness. His glory becomes manifest through you.

You're not trying to be like Christ through imitation. You're allowing Christ's life to express itself through you through abiding. You're not striving to produce fruit. You're maintaining connection with the Vine who produces fruit through you.

This union is the source of all spiritual life, all transformation, all fruitfulness, all glory. Without it, nothing. With it, everything.

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Positional and Experiential

But here's where theology meets practice: your union with Christ is both positional and experiential. Both legal standing and lived reality. Both accomplished fact and daily practice.

Positionally, you're in Christ. This was settled at conversion. This is secure. This doesn't fluctuate based on your feelings or performance. You're in Him, He's in you, and nothing can separate you from this union (Romans 8:38-39).

But experientially, you must learn to abide. To consciously maintain awareness of this union. To actively draw on the resources available in Christ. To practically live from your position in Him.

Many Christians have strong positional theology but weak experiential practice. They know they're in Christ doctrinally but don't live in conscious abiding practically. They understand union theologically but don't experience it vitally.

Abiding is how positional reality becomes experiential vitality. How theological truth becomes practical power. How legal standing becomes lived experience.

You are in Christ—that's settled. Now abide in Christ—that's practiced. You have everything in Him—that's certain. Now draw on everything that's yours—that's daily discipline.

The Fruit of Abiding

Now we come to the purpose of abiding: fruit. Not just any fruit, but fruit that glorifies God, demonstrates transformation, and manifests His character through your life.

Fruit, Not Works

But first, we need to distinguish between fruit and works. This distinction is critical.

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Works suggest human effort, self-generated production, achievement through striving. Fruit suggests organic growth, natural overflow, inevitable result of life.

Jesus doesn't say, "Work really hard to produce fruit." He says, "Abide in Me...he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit."

Bears. Not produces through effort. Not manufactures through willpower. Bears. Like a tree bearing apples. The tree doesn't try to produce apples. Apples are the natural result of a healthy tree receiving proper nutrients, water, and sunlight.

You bear fruit through abiding. Fruit is the natural overflow of life flowing from the Vine through the branch. It's not something you create through effort. It's something that emerges through connection.

This is why striving produces exhaustion while abiding produces fruitfulness. When you try to generate fruit through self-effort, you burn out. When you bear fruit through abiding, you're energized because the life isn't coming from you—it's flowing through you.

Much Fruit Glorifies the Father

But notice the purpose of fruit: John 15:8 says, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

The Father is glorified. This is the point. This is why fruit matters. Not to make you impressive. Not to prove your spiritual superiority. Not to earn God's approval. To glorify the Father.

When fruit appears in your life—when love, joy, peace, patience, and all the rest emerge—people don't praise you. They praise the Vine. They glorify the Father. They marvel at what God has done, not what you've accomplished.

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And fruit proves discipleship. Not proves as in "earns the status of disciple," but proves as in "evidences authentic discipleship." Fruit is the external demonstration of internal reality. The visible expression of invisible union. The outward manifestation of inward connection.

When people see fruit in your life, they see evidence that you're genuinely connected to the Vine. That your claim to be Christ's disciple is authentic. That transformation is real, not performative.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 specifies what this fruit looks like: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Notice it's "fruit" (singular), not "fruits" (plural). It's one fruit with nine expressions. All flowing from the same source: the Spirit. All emerging from the same connection: abiding in Christ.

And notice these aren't behaviors you force. They're character qualities that emerge. You don't try to be more patient. You abide in Christ, and patience emerges as His life flows through you. You don't manufacture joy. You remain connected to the Vine, and joy bubbles up naturally.

Let's look at each manifestation:

Love (*agapē*)—selfless, sacrificial, others-focused love. Not romantic feeling but committed action. This is Christ's nature. As you abide in Him, His love flows through you to others.

Joy (*chara*)—deep gladness independent of circumstances. Not happiness based on happenings, but joy rooted in relationship with Christ. When you're abiding in Him, joy remains even when circumstances are difficult.

Peace (*eirēnē*)—wholeness, tranquility, reconciliation. Not absence of conflict but presence of wholeness even amid chaos. Abiding in the Prince of Peace produces peace in your soul.

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Patience (*makrothymia*)—long-suffering, endurance with people and circumstances. The ability to remain steady under provocation. When you're drawing strength from the Vine, you can endure what would otherwise break you.

Kindness (*chrēstotēs*)—active goodness, practical compassion, tender-hearted care. Christ's kindness flowing through you to others as you remain connected to Him.

Goodness (*agathōsynē*)—moral excellence, generosity of spirit, integrity of character. The righteousness of Christ expressing itself through your choices.

Faithfulness (*pistis*)—reliability, trustworthiness, steadfast commitment. Christ's faithfulness reproduced in you as you abide in Him.

Gentleness (*praotēs*)—strength under control, power tempered with humility. Not weakness but meekness—controlled strength. Christ's gentleness manifested through your interactions.

Self-control (*enkratēia*)—mastery over impulses, discipline of desires, governance of appetites. Not white-knuckle willpower but Spirit-enabled control as you walk in step with Him.

All of these are glory-expressions. Visible manifestations of Christ's character. External evidence of internal abiding. And none of them are produced through self-effort—they're all fruit born through connection to the Vine.

Apart from Me, Nothing

But Jesus doesn't just say fruit comes through abiding. He says fruit is impossible without abiding: "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Nothing. Not "very little." Not "less effectively." Nothing. Zero. Zilch.

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This isn't hyperbole. This is reality. Apart from Christ—disconnected from the Vine, attempting to function independently—you can do nothing of eternal value. You might accomplish impressive things by worldly standards. You might succeed spectacularly by human measures. But spiritually? Nothing.

All the religious activity in the world won't produce one ounce of genuine spiritual fruit if it's done apart from abiding in Christ. All the Bible studies, all the church attendance, all the ministry involvement, all the moral effort—none of it produces real fruit without vital connection to Jesus.

This is sobering. But it's also liberating. Because it means you can stop trying to generate spiritual results through your own effort. You can cease striving to produce transformation through religious performance. You can abandon the exhausting attempt to manufacture fruit through willpower.

Instead, you can abide. Connect. Remain. Dwell. And let the life of the Vine flow through you, producing fruit you could never manufacture on your own.

Prayer: The Language of Abiding

Now we need to address the primary practice of abiding: prayer. Not prayer as religious duty, but prayer as communion. Not prayer as asking for things, but prayer as relationship. Not prayer as occasional activity, but prayer as ongoing conversation with the One in whom you abide.

Praying Without Ceasing

1 Thessalonians 5:17 commands: "pray without ceasing."

Without ceasing. Continuously. Constantly. Uninterruptedly. This isn't about formal prayer postures or religious language. This is about living in ongoing communication with God. Maintaining continuous awareness of His presence. Walking through life in conversation with Him.

Brother Lawrence described this as "practicing the presence of God"—learning to do everything as unto the Lord, in conscious awareness of His presence, in continuous communion with Him.

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This is abiding expressed through prayer. Not just scheduled prayer times (though those are valuable). Ongoing conversation. Continuous communion. Walking through your day talking with God—not just to Him, but with Him.

It's talking to God about the frustration you're feeling. Thanking Him for the sunset you just noticed. Asking for wisdom about the decision you're facing. Confessing the sin you just committed. Celebrating the victory you just experienced. Processing the pain you're enduring.

It's living in such constant awareness of God's presence that conversation with Him becomes as natural as breathing. Not forcing it. Not manufacturing it. Just maintaining the connection, keeping the line open, staying in communication.

Prayer as the Greater Work

Oswald Chambers wrote: "Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work."

This inverts our typical thinking. We assume prayer prepares us for ministry, for service, for the real work. But Chambers says prayer *is* the real work. Prayer is the greater work.

Why? Because in prayer, the actual transformation happens. In prayer, the vital connection is maintained. In prayer, the life flows from Vine to branch. In prayer, dependence is acknowledged and resources are received.

All the external ministry, all the visible service, all the apparent accomplishment—it's secondary. The primary work is prayer. The fundamental activity is abiding. The essential practice is communion with Christ.

This doesn't make external ministry unimportant. It puts it in proper perspective. Ministry flows from prayer. Service emerges from abiding. Fruitfulness results from communion. But without the foundation of prayer—without the vital connection of abiding—all the external activity is disconnected branches trying to bear fruit independently.

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Not Technique, But Relationship

But we need to be clear: prayer isn't a technique to master. It's a relationship to enjoy. It's not a skill to perfect. It's communion to experience. It's not a discipline that earns God's favor. It's a privilege that expresses dependence.

Too many Christians approach prayer as performance. They worry about saying the right words, using proper language, following correct formulas. They turn prayer into religious duty rather than relational delight.

But Jesus invites us to simply talk with the Father. Matthew 6:6 says, "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Your Father. Not a distant deity. Not an impersonal force. Your Father. Who loves you. Who delights in you. Who wants to hear from you. Who longs for communion with you.

Prayer is conversation with your Father. Sometimes formal. Sometimes informal. Sometimes structured. Sometimes spontaneous. Sometimes eloquent. Sometimes inarticulate groans (Romans 8:26). But always relational. Always communal. Always connection.

The Content of Abiding Prayer

So what do you pray when you're abiding? What does ongoing communion look like?

Worship—acknowledging who God is, celebrating His character, expressing adoration. Not just at the beginning of prayer, but woven throughout your day as you notice His attributes displayed in creation, circumstances, Scripture.

Thanksgiving—gratitude for what God has done, is doing, will do. Specific thanks. Concrete appreciation. Cultivating a grateful heart that notices blessings and verbally acknowledges the Giver.

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Confession—honest acknowledgment of sin, failure, shortcoming. Not vague generalities but specific admissions. Receiving cleansing (1 John 1:9). Maintaining short accounts.

Petition—asking for needs, expressing desires, seeking provision. Jesus invites this: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). Bring your requests. Make your needs known. Trust Him with outcomes.

Intercession—praying for others. Carrying their burdens before the throne. Standing in the gap. Participating in God's work in others' lives through prayer.

Listening—not just talking but listening. Creating space for God to speak. Waiting in silence. Paying attention to the Spirit's promptings, Scripture's illumination, circumstances' direction.

All of this flows naturally when you're abiding. It's not forced. It's not obligatory. It's the natural conversation that happens when you're living in conscious communion with Christ.

The Posture of Dependence

But underneath all prayer content is a fundamental posture: dependence. Prayer is the acknowledgment that you need God. That you can't do life alone. That apart from Him, you can do nothing.

This is why prayerlessness is actually a statement of independence. It says, "I've got this. I don't need help. I'm sufficient in myself." It's functional atheism—living as if God doesn't exist or doesn't matter.

But prayer—continuous, ongoing, moment-by-moment prayer—is a declaration of dependence. It says, "I need You. I can't do this without You. I'm abiding in You because apart from You, I can do nothing."

This is the posture of abiding: conscious, continual, grateful dependence. Not grudging admission of weakness, but joyful acknowledgment that in Christ you have everything you need.

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Andrew Murray wrote: "Prayer is the pulse of the renewed soul; and the constancy of its beat is the test and measure of the spiritual life."

Check your pulse. How constant is your prayerfulness? How continuous is your communion? How dependent is your daily walk?

If prayer is rare, sporadic, or relegated to crisis moments only—the pulse is weak. The connection is intermittent. The abiding is shallow.

But if prayer is continuous, natural, as constant as breathing—the pulse is strong. The connection is vital. The abiding is deep.

Practicing Abiding

So how do you actually abide? How do you make this more than theory? How do you translate the imperative to abide into practical daily life?

First, start with awareness. Begin each day consciously acknowledging your union with Christ. "I am in Christ. Christ is in me. I cannot bear fruit apart from Him. Today, I choose to abide."

Second, cultivate ongoing conversation. Talk to God throughout your day. Not just at designated times, but continuously. Turn your thoughts into prayers. Transform your concerns into conversations. Make communion your default mode.

Third, schedule sacred stillness. While abiding is continuous, you also need times of focused communion. Set aside specific times for undistracted prayer, Scripture reading, worship. These aren't earning favor—they're enjoying fellowship.

Fourth, return quickly when you wander. You will forget. You will get distracted. You will slip into independence. When you notice, simply return. "I'm wandering. I'm returning to abiding in You." No condemnation. No shame. Just return.

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Fifth, let Scripture keep you connected. God speaks through His Word. Regular Scripture intake keeps you tuned to His voice, shaped by His truth, connected to His heart. Read not just for information but for communion.

Sixth, practice gratitude constantly. Gratitude keeps you aware of God's provision, goodness, presence. Throughout your day, notice blessings and thank Him. "Thank You for this sunset. Thank You for this meal. Thank You for this breath."

Seventh, make decisions from abiding. Before acting, pause. "What does the Vine want?" Before speaking, ask. "How does Christ want to speak through me?" Before choosing, check. "What emerges from abiding, not striving?"

Eighth, confess quickly when you sin. Don't let sin create distance. Acknowledge it immediately. Receive cleansing. Return to abiding. Keep short accounts.

Ninth, remember you're a branch, not the vine. When you're tempted to try producing fruit through effort, remember: branches don't produce—they bear. Vines produce. Branches receive and express what flows from the vine.

Tenth, trust the Vinedresser. God is pruning you (John 15:2). Sometimes the abiding feels dry. Sometimes connection seems distant. Sometimes fruit appears absent. Trust the process. The Vinedresser knows what He's doing.

Abiding isn't complicated. It's not mystical. It's not reserved for spiritual giants. It's simply learning to live in conscious, continuous, dependent connection with Christ—recognizing that He is the Vine, you are the branch, and fruit only comes through union.

You don't earn the right to abide through spiritual achievement. You don't qualify for connection through moral perfection. You abide because you're in Christ. You remain because He remains in you. You connect because connection has been established.

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Your job isn't to create union. Your job is to consciously live from the union that already exists. Not to achieve abiding, but to practice abiding. Not to earn connection, but to maintain awareness of connection.

This is the prerequisite of presence. The foundation of fruitfulness. The source of all spiritual life, transformation, and glory.

You cannot manifest glory through effort. But you can manifest glory through abiding. You cannot produce fruit through striving. But you will bear fruit through remaining connected to the Vine.

Abide in Him. Let Him abide in you. Maintain the connection. Enjoy the communion. Trust the life flow. And watch fruit emerge that you could never produce on your own.

The branch that abides bears fruit. The Christian who abides manifests glory. Not through trying harder, but through trusting deeper. Not through doing more, but through remaining connected. Not through religious performance, but through vital relationship.

Abide in Christ. This is the daily practice. This is the prerequisite. This is the source of everything that matters.

Apart from Him, nothing. In Him, everything. The choice is clear.

Abide.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." — John 15:5 (NASB)

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CHAPTER 12

The Word of Glory—Transformation Through Truth

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." — John 17:17 (NASB)

Here's a question that will reveal something about your spiritual life: When was the last time Scripture actually changed you?

Not informed you. Not inspired you. Not comforted you—though all of those are valuable. But actually *changed* you? When was the last time you encountered truth in God's Word that fundamentally altered how you think, what you value, or how you live?

If you're honest, it might have been a while. Not because Scripture has lost its power—it hasn't. But because somewhere along the way, many of us stopped treating the Bible as transformative truth and started treating it as religious information.

We read it to check a box. We study it to gain knowledge. We memorize it to impress others. We quote it to win arguments. We use it to support positions we've already formed. But we don't often let it do what it's designed to do: sanctify us. Transform us. Renew our minds. Change us from the inside out.

This is tragic. Because the Word of God is the primary instrument the Spirit uses to prepare us for glory. It's the means by which our minds are renewed, our hearts are shaped, our characters are formed, and our lives are transformed from one degree of glory to the next.

Jesus prayed this for His disciples—and for you: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." Make them holy through truth. Set them apart through Your Word. Transform them through what You've revealed.

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This isn't optional. This isn't for Bible scholars or theology nerds only. This is the daily practice of glory for every Christian. Because you cannot be transformed into Christ's image without being shaped by Christ's Word. You cannot manifest glory without being saturated in truth. You cannot bear lasting fruit without being rooted in Scripture.

The Word of God is living and active. It's not ancient history that needs reviving. It's current truth that does the reviving. It's not dead text requiring your effort to bring to life. It's living truth that brings you to life as you expose yourself to it.

This chapter is about learning to engage Scripture not as information to acquire but as truth that transforms. Not as data to download but as bread to digest. Not as ancient text to analyze but as living Word to encounter.

Because when Scripture does what it's designed to do—when truth sanctifies, when the Word renews minds, when the Spirit illuminates revelation—transformation happens. Glory emerges. Christ's image becomes increasingly visible in increasingly surrendered lives.

The Sanctifying Power of Scripture

Let's start with Jesus's prayer: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

Sanctify. The Greek word (*hagiazō*) means to make holy, to set apart, to consecrate. It's the process by which you become increasingly like God in character—separated from sin and devoted to righteousness.

And Jesus says this sanctification happens through truth. Specifically, through God's Word, which is truth.

Truth That Makes Holy

This is remarkable. Scripture doesn't just tell you about holiness. It produces holiness. The Word doesn't just describe sanctification. It accomplishes sanctification. Truth doesn't just point toward transformation. Truth is the means of transformation.

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But how? How does reading ancient text written thousands of years ago in different languages to different cultures actually make you holy today?

Because it's not just ancient text. It's God's living Word. It's not just human writing. It's divine revelation. It's not just information about God. It's communication from God. And when the Spirit takes this Word and applies it to your heart, transformation happens.

Psalm 119:9, 11 captures this: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word...Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You."

Notice the mechanism: treasure God's Word in your heart, and you don't sin. Not because you're trying harder not to sin, but because the Word treasured internally produces purity externally. The truth stored in your heart shapes the choices that flow from your heart.

This is sanctification through Scripture. Truth internalized produces holiness expressed. The Word dwelling richly within you (Colossians 3:16) creates character that increasingly reflects God's character.

Living and Active

But Hebrews 4:12 goes even further in describing Scripture's power: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Living. Present tense. Right now. Today. The Word isn't a historical artifact that was once alive. It is alive. Currently. Continuously. It breathes. It moves. It works. It has inherent life and power.

Active. Working. Effective. Accomplishing. The Word doesn't just exist—it acts. It doesn't just inform—it transforms. It doesn't just describe reality—it changes reality by changing those who encounter it.

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Sharper than any two-edged sword. Penetrating. Cutting. Dividing. The Word goes deeper than any human insight. It cuts through layers of self-deception, rationalization, and justification. It exposes what's hidden. It reveals what's concealed. It brings to light what we'd prefer to keep in darkness.

Able to judge thoughts and intentions. The Word doesn't just address behavior. It evaluates motivation. It doesn't just examine actions. It exposes heart attitudes. It doesn't just correct what you do. It reveals why you do it.

This is why Scripture is so powerful for sanctification. It reaches depths no human counsel can reach. It exposes truths no self-examination can discover. It transforms at levels no willpower can access.

God-Breathed Authority

But Scripture can only do this because of what it is: God's very breath. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 declares: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Inspired by God. The Greek word (*theopneustos*) literally means "God-breathed." Every word of Scripture is breathed out by God. Not just the ideas. Not just the concepts. The very words themselves carry divine authority because they originate from divine breath.

This means when you read Scripture, you're not just reading human thoughts about God. You're encountering God's thoughts revealed to humans. You're not just learning religious ideas. You're hearing God speak.

And because Scripture is God-breathed, it's profitable—useful, beneficial, effective—for everything necessary for sanctification:

Teaching: Instruction in truth. Learning what's right, what's true, what aligns with reality as God defines it.

Reproof: Exposure of error. Conviction when you're believing lies, thinking wrongly, living falsely.

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Correction: Restoration to right thinking and living. Not just showing what's wrong, but showing what's right and how to get there.

Training in righteousness: Disciplined development in godliness. Progressive growth in Christ-likeness through systematic exposure to truth.

All of this—every dimension of sanctification—happens through Scripture. Not exclusively (the Spirit uses other means too), but primarily. The Word is God's chosen instrument for making you holy.

Sufficient and Complete

And notice the result: "so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Adequate. Sufficient. Complete. Not partially prepared. Not somewhat equipped. Fully adequate. Thoroughly equipped. Completely sufficient.

Scripture gives you everything you need for godliness. Not everything you might want to know. Not answers to every curiosity. But everything necessary for living a life that pleases God, bears fruit, and manifests His glory.

You don't need additional revelation beyond Scripture. You don't need secret knowledge accessible only to spiritual elites. You don't need mystical experiences to supplement what Scripture provides. The Word is sufficient.

This is liberating. You don't have to wonder if you're missing something. You don't have to chase after extra-biblical experiences or teachings. Everything necessary for sanctification is available in Scripture, applied by the Spirit, received through faith.

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Transformed by Renewal

But how specifically does Scripture transform? What's the mechanism? Paul explains in Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Transformation happens through mind renewal. And mind renewal happens through truth—specifically, through Scripture.

The Battle for Your Mind

Your mind is a battlefield. Every day, competing narratives vie for your allegiance. The world's values clash with God's values. Cultural assumptions contradict biblical truth. Media messaging conflicts with scriptural revelation.

And you must choose: Which narrative will shape your thinking? Which truth will inform your values? Which voice will determine your choices?

Paul says: don't be conformed to this world. Don't let the world's pattern squeeze you into its mold. Don't allow cultural values to shape your thinking. Don't permit media messaging to form your worldview.

Instead, be transformed. Undergo metamorphosis. Experience radical change from the inside out. And the mechanism? Renewing of your mind.

Your mind renewed produces your life transformed. Changed thinking creates changed living. New thoughts generate new choices. Truth believed produces truth lived.

But mind renewal doesn't happen automatically. It requires intentional, repeated, sustained exposure to truth. It requires saturating your mind in Scripture until biblical truth becomes your default thinking pattern.

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The Renewal Process

So how do you renew your mind through Scripture?

First, exposure. You can't be transformed by truth you never encounter. Regular, consistent Scripture reading is foundational. Not legalistic duty, but practical necessity. You're feeding your mind truth that displaces lies, replaces error, and reforms thinking.

Second, meditation. Don't just read—think deeply. Reflect. Ponder. Chew on truth like a cow chewing cud. Let it settle. Let it permeate. Let it work its way deep into your thinking patterns.

Psalm 1:2 describes the blessed person: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." Meditation. Ongoing reflection. Continuous pondering. Sustained thinking about God's truth.

Third, memorization. Hide God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). Not just for recall but for constant availability. When truth is memorized, the Spirit can bring it to mind exactly when you need it—in temptation, in difficulty, in decision-making.

Fourth, application. James 1:22 warns: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Hearing without doing is self-deception. Truth encountered must become truth applied. Otherwise, you're like someone looking in a mirror and immediately forgetting what you saw.

Fifth, repetition. Mind renewal isn't a one-time event. It's continuous process. You need repeated exposure to truth because old patterns die hard and cultural messaging is constant. Daily immersion in Scripture creates progressive transformation.

Replacing Lies with Truth

But here's what's actually happening in mind renewal: you're identifying lies you've believed and replacing them with truth.

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Everyone believes lies. Some from childhood. Some from culture. Some from wounding. Some from the enemy. These lies shape how you think, what you value, how you live.

"I'm worthless." Lie. "I'm defined by my performance." Lie. "God is distant and disapproving." Lie. "My sin disqualifies me." Lie. "I'm alone." Lie. "My circumstances determine my joy." Lie.

Scripture exposes these lies and replaces them with truth:

"I'm God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Truth. "I'm complete in Christ" (Colossians 2:10). Truth. "Nothing can separate me from God's love" (Romans 8:38-39). Truth. "There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Truth. "God will never leave me nor forsake me" (Hebrews 13:5). Truth. "I can rejoice always because my joy is rooted in Christ, not circumstances" (Philippians 4:4). Truth.

This is mind renewal. Lies exposed. Truth believed. Thinking patterns transformed. And as your mind is renewed, your life is transformed—not through trying harder, but through thinking differently based on truth believed.

The Spirit's Role

But mind renewal isn't just cognitive exercise. It's spiritual transformation. The Spirit takes the Word and makes it alive in you.

1 Corinthians 2:10-12 explains: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God."

The Spirit reveals. The Spirit illuminates. The Spirit teaches. Without the Spirit's work, Scripture is just text. With the Spirit's illumination, Scripture becomes God's living voice speaking directly into your situation, your struggle, your heart.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is why you pray before reading Scripture. Why you ask the Spirit to illuminate. Why you approach the Word with dependence, not just diligence. Because apart from the Spirit's work, you can read without being transformed. But with the Spirit's illumination, even familiar passages become fresh revelation.

The Mirror of Truth

James gives us another powerful metaphor for Scripture's transforming work: a mirror. James 1:23-25 says:

"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

Scripture Shows You Yourself

A mirror's function is revelation. It shows you what you can't see without it. It reveals what's actually there, not what you imagine is there.

Scripture functions like a mirror—it shows you truth about yourself that you can't see on your own. It reveals sin you've rationalized. It exposes motives you've hidden. It brings to light attitudes you've denied. It shows you who you actually are, not who you pretend to be.

This is uncomfortable. Nobody likes what a spiritual mirror reveals—the pride we've nursed, the bitterness we've harbored, the selfishness we've justified, the hypocrisy we've practiced.

But this revelation is necessary. You can't repent of sin you won't acknowledge. You can't change patterns you won't admit. You can't be healed from wounds you won't expose. The mirror of Scripture must reveal before the Spirit can heal.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Scripture Shows You Christ

But Scripture doesn't just show you yourself. It shows you Christ. And as you gaze at His glory reflected in Scripture, you're transformed into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is the more important function. Yes, Scripture exposes your sin. But primarily, Scripture reveals your Savior. Yes, it shows your brokenness. But ultimately, it displays His beauty.

When you read the Gospels, you see Jesus—His compassion, His wisdom, His authority, His sacrifice, His resurrection. When you read the Epistles, you understand what He accomplished—redemption, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, glorification.

And as you gaze at Christ in Scripture, something happens. You begin to reflect what you're beholding. His character rubs off on you. His values become your values. His priorities become your priorities. His love flows through you.

You're not imitating Christ through external effort. You're being transformed into His likeness through internal exposure. You're not trying to be like Jesus. You're becoming like Jesus through sustained gazing at Jesus revealed in Scripture.

Looking Intently vs. Glancing Casually

But notice James's distinction: "one who looks *intently* at the perfect law."

Not glances. Not skims. Not casually observes. Looks intently. Gazes carefully. Examines thoroughly. Studies deeply.

This is the difference between transformative Bible reading and superficial Bible reading. Glancing at Scripture provides minimal impact. Looking intently produces maximum transformation.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Looking intently means:

- Reading slowly, not rushing through chapters to meet a quota
- Asking questions: What does this reveal about God? About myself? About how to live?
- Sitting with difficult passages rather than skipping past them
- Returning repeatedly to the same text, mining deeper each time
- Letting Scripture question you rather than just you questioning Scripture

And James adds: the one who looks intently and "abides by it"—who doesn't just look and forget, but looks and obeys—"this man will be blessed in what he does."

Blessing comes through looking intently and living accordingly. Through seeing truth and becoming a doer of truth. Through encountering Scripture and being transformed by Scripture.

The Perfect Law of Liberty

But notice what James calls Scripture: "the perfect law, the law of liberty."

Perfect. Complete. Lacking nothing. Fully sufficient. Not needing correction or addition.

But also: law of liberty. Not law of bondage. Not rules that enslave. Law that frees.

This seems paradoxical. How can law produce liberty? Because this law reveals truth that sets you free. This law exposes lies that imprison you. This law shows you the narrow way that leads to life, not the broad way that leads to destruction.

Jesus said in John 8:32: "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Truth liberates. Lies enslave. Scripture is the law of liberty because it's revelation of truth that frees you from bondage to lies, sin, self-deception, and darkness.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Eating and Digesting Truth

But perhaps the most vivid biblical metaphor for engaging Scripture is eating. Not just reading Scripture, but consuming it. Digesting it. Making it part of your internal life.

Words as Food

Jeremiah 15:16 says: "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts."

I ate them. Not just read them. Not just heard them. Ate them. Consumed them. Made them part of me. Let them nourish me from the inside.

This is what Scripture is meant to do. Not just inform your mind but nourish your soul. Not just provide knowledge but supply sustenance. Not just give information but offer life.

Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

You need physical food to sustain physical life. You need spiritual food to sustain spiritual life. And Scripture is that food. God's words proceeding from His mouth, providing nourishment for your soul.

Without physical food, you starve physically. Without spiritual food, you starve spiritually. The soul needs regular feeding just as the body does. And Scripture is the primary diet for soul health.

The Process of Digestion

But eating isn't enough. You must digest. Food consumed but not digested provides no nourishment. It must be broken down, absorbed, assimilated into your system.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The same with Scripture. You can read without digesting. You can hear without absorbing. You can study without assimilating. And if truth isn't digested—if it doesn't become part of your internal life—it doesn't nourish.

Digesting Scripture means:

- Meditation: Chewing on truth repeatedly until it breaks down into absorbable insights
- Reflection: Thinking about implications, applications, connections
- Internalization: Allowing truth to work its way into your belief system, not just your knowledge base
- Integration: Letting Scripture shape how you think, not just what you know

Psalm 119:103 describes this: "How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

Sweet to taste. This is savoring, not gulping. Enjoying, not just ingesting. Delighting in the flavor, not just filling the stomach.

When you read Scripture looking only for information to extract, you're not digesting—you're speed-eating. But when you read slowly, savoring truth, letting it settle, allowing it to permeate your thinking—you're digesting. And digested truth nourishes in ways skimmed information never can.

Daily Bread

Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

Daily. Not weekly. Not occasional. Daily. Because you need daily sustenance. Yesterday's bread doesn't satisfy today's hunger. Last week's meal doesn't provide this week's nourishment.

Your soul needs daily feeding. Not just Sunday's sermon. Not just occasional devotional reading. Daily intake of Scripture that provides daily nourishment for daily living.

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This isn't legalism. This is necessity. Your soul gets hungry. Spiritual malnutrition happens through neglect. And the primary symptom of soul-starvation is spiritual weakness—susceptibility to temptation, vulnerability to lies, powerlessness in trial, fruitlessness in living.

But daily feeding produces daily strength. Regular intake of Scripture creates sustained spiritual health. Consistent digestion of truth generates ongoing transformation.

Not End But Means

But A.W. Tozer reminds us: "The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God."

Scripture isn't the goal. God is the goal. The Bible isn't an idol to worship. It's a revelation to encounter. Scripture points beyond itself to the One it reveals.

You don't read the Bible just to know the Bible. You read the Bible to know God. You don't study Scripture just to master information. You study Scripture to meet the Author.

This keeps Bible reading from becoming mechanical or legalistic. You're not checking boxes. You're encountering the living God through His living Word. You're not just learning about Him. You're learning to know Him—intimately, personally, transformingly.

And that knowledge—not head knowledge alone, but heart knowledge, experiential knowledge, relational knowledge—that's what transforms. That's what sanctifies. That's what prepares you for glory.

Practicing the Word

So how do you actually engage Scripture in transformative ways? How do you move beyond information gathering to genuine transformation?

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

First, come with expectation. Approach Scripture believing God will speak. Expecting the Spirit to illuminate. Anticipating transformation, not just information. The Word is living—expect to encounter the Living One.

Second, pray before reading. Ask the Spirit to teach you, to open your eyes to see wonderful things in His law (Psalm 119:18), to make truth come alive, to apply what you read to what you need.

Third, read slowly. Don't rush. Don't treat it like a task to complete. Read meditatively. Reflectively. Allow words to settle. Let truth sink in.

Fourth, ask questions. What does this reveal about God? About myself? About how to live? What's the main point? How does this connect to Christ? What does obedience look like?

Fifth, meditate throughout the day. Don't just read and close the Book. Carry truth with you. Think about it during transitions. Reflect on it during quiet moments. Let it permeate your thinking.

Sixth, memorize key verses. Hide them in your heart. Make them immediately accessible. The Spirit uses memorized truth precisely when needed—in temptation, trial, decision-making.

Seventh, apply specifically. Don't just learn generally. Identify specific ways truth applies to your current situations, struggles, relationships, choices. Make truth practical, not just theoretical.

Eighth, obey promptly. When the Spirit convicts, respond quickly. When truth exposes sin, confess immediately. When Scripture directs, obey without delay. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Prompt obedience keeps your heart soft and responsive.

Ninth, share with others. Discuss what you're learning. Teaching others reinforces your own learning. Sharing truth multiplies its impact. Community Bible study deepens individual understanding.

Tenth, return to favorites. Some passages feed your soul especially well. Return to them. Drink deeply from wells that consistently refresh. Meditate on truths that particularly nourish you.

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Eleventh, read comprehensively. Don't just cherry-pick favorite passages. Read the whole counsel of God. Let uncomfortable texts challenge you. Let unfamiliar passages expand you. Let all Scripture teach you.

Twelfth, connect to Christ. Look for Jesus everywhere in Scripture. The entire Bible points to Him. Old Testament anticipates Him. Gospels reveal Him. Epistles explain Him. Revelation glorifies Him. Read Christologically—always asking: How does this connect to Christ?

When Scripture Feels Dead

But let's be honest about something: sometimes Scripture feels dead. Dry. Boring. Mechanical. You read but nothing happens. You study but don't encounter. You try but don't connect.

What then?

First, don't panic. Dry seasons happen. They're not punishment. They're not evidence you've lost your salvation. They're part of the journey. The Word is still living and active even when you don't feel it.

Second, keep reading. Don't stop when it feels dry. Spiritual disciplines aren't based on feelings. Continue showing up. Keep exposing yourself to truth. Trust the Word is working even when you don't sense it.

Third, examine your heart. Sometimes dryness reflects unconfessed sin creating distance. Sometimes it's disobedience to truth already revealed. Sometimes it's coming to Scripture for information rather than transformation. Ask the Spirit to search your heart.

Fourth, change your approach. If your current reading plan feels mechanical, try something different. Read a different book. Use a different translation. Try reading aloud. Incorporate more meditation. Vary your method.

Fifth, pray through Scripture. Instead of just reading, pray the Psalms. Let biblical prayers become your prayers. Use Scripture as a springboard for conversation with God.

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Sixth, remember the purpose. You're not reading to feel good (though that happens). You're reading to be transformed. Even when Scripture feels dry, truth is still sanctifying, renewing, transforming—often in ways you don't immediately perceive.

Seventh, trust the process. Transformation isn't always felt. Growth isn't always obvious. The Spirit works whether you sense it or not. Keep feeding on truth. Trust the Word to accomplish what it was sent to do (Isaiah 55:11).

The Word of God is living and active. Always. Whether you feel it or not. Whether you sense it or not. Whether you're aware of it or not.

Your job isn't to make the Word alive—it already is. Your job is to expose yourself to it regularly, receive it humbly, digest it thoroughly, and obey it promptly.

And as you do—as you saturate your mind in Scripture, meditate on truth, memorize God's Word, and apply what you read—transformation happens. Mind renewal occurs. Sanctification progresses. Glory emerges.

Not through your effort, but through the Spirit using the Word to conform you increasingly to Christ's image. Not through willpower, but through truth believed, received, digested, and lived.

The Word of glory transforms you for glory. Let it do its work.

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."— Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 13

The Community of Glory—Iron Sharpening Iron

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."— Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB)

I need to tell you something you probably don't want to hear: you cannot become who God created you to be by yourself.

I know that contradicts everything our culture tells us. We live in the age of the individual, the self-made person, the independent achiever. We celebrate those who "don't need anyone," who "forge their own path," who succeed "against all odds" through sheer personal determination.

And we've imported this individualism into Christianity. We talk about "personal relationship with Jesus" (which is true) and somehow conclude that means "private, isolated, nobody-else-needed religion" (which is false). We pursue spiritual growth as a solo endeavor. We treat church attendance as optional. We consume Christian content online while avoiding actual Christian community. We read our Bibles alone, pray alone, and try to live the Christian life alone.

And then we wonder why we're stuck. Why transformation is so slow. Why we keep falling into the same patterns. Why victory over sin feels so elusive. Why bearing fruit seems so difficult.

Here's the truth Scripture makes abundantly clear: God never designed you to grow alone. Transformation isn't a solo project. Sanctification isn't an individual achievement. Glory isn't manifested in isolation.

You were created for community. You're saved into community. You're sanctified through community. You'll be glorified with community. From beginning to end, God's design for your preparation for glory is corporate, not just individual.

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John Wesley nailed it: "The New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion." You can search Scripture from Genesis to Revelation and you won't find God's plan for lone-ranger Christians. You'll find families, tribes, nations, congregations, assemblies, bodies. You'll find "one anothers" throughout—over 100 commands about how to relate to other believers.

This isn't accidental. This isn't cultural preference that can be updated for modern individualism. This is God's design. He intends to prepare you for glory through the messy, difficult, inconvenient, absolutely essential context of community.

Not just any community. Christian community. The body of Christ. The assembly of believers. The church—not as building or institution, but as people gathered around Christ, connected to each other, committed to mutual transformation.

This is iron sharpening iron. This is bearing one another's burdens. This is speaking truth in love. This is the community of glory—where individual believers, each being transformed from glory to glory, help each other along the way.

The Corporate Dimension of Sanctification

Let's start with the fundamental truth: sanctification has an irreducible corporate dimension. Yes, your relationship with God is personal. But your transformation happens primarily in community, not isolation.

We Don't Grow in Isolation

Think about how Scripture describes salvation and sanctification. It's almost always plural, corporate, communal:

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). Not "you are a chosen individual." A race. A priesthood. A nation. A people. Corporate identity.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). We. Not I. Corporate creation.

"But you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). You (plural) are the body. Individually, you're members—parts of the whole, not self-sufficient wholes.

Even Jesus's prayer for future believers emphasizes community: "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one" (John 17:20-21). That they may all be one. Unity. Community. Corporate identity.

This isn't incidental. God designed transformation to happen primarily in the context of committed Christian community. Not exclusively—you grow through private Bible reading, individual prayer, personal obedience. But primarily—most of your significant transformation happens through relationships with other believers.

Why? Because community does things isolation can't.

The Body Metaphor

Paul's extended metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is instructive:

**"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...For the body is not one member, but many...But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired...But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

Notice several crucial truths:

You're not the whole body—you're a member. You're not complete in yourself. You're a part designed to function within a whole. An eye by itself is useless. A hand disconnected from the body is dead. You need the body to function as God designed you to function.

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God placed you in the body. This isn't your choice alone. God positioned you within the body according to His will. You don't get to opt out because community is inconvenient or because you prefer isolation.

You need other members. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'" You need what others bring. They need what you bring. You're interdependent by design, not self-sufficient by accident.

Different members have different functions. Not everyone serves the same role. Not everyone has the same gifts. Not everyone contributes identically. But everyone is necessary. The diversity isn't a problem to solve—it's God's design to celebrate.

This metaphor demolishes individualistic Christianity. You can't be a healthy Christian in isolation any more than an eye can function apart from the body. You need the body. The body needs you. And God uses the body—the community—to shape, sharpen, refine, and transform you.

What Community Provides

But what specifically does community provide that isolation can't?

Accountability. Left to yourself, you rationalize sin, justify selfishness, and believe your own lies. Community holds up a mirror showing you what you can't see yourself. Others can lovingly say, "This pattern isn't healthy. That choice isn't wise. This attitude isn't Christ-like."

Encouragement. When you're discouraged, overwhelmed, or ready to quit, community reminds you of truth you've forgotten. They speak hope when you feel hopeless. They point you back to Christ when you're looking inward.

Correction. You have blind spots. Theological errors. Behavioral patterns. Wrong thinking. And you can't see them yourself. You need others who love you enough to tell you the truth even when it's uncomfortable.

Example. You learn by watching others further along the journey. You see what mature faith looks like in practice. You observe how seasoned believers handle trials, resist temptation, love enemies, trust God.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Service opportunities. Your gifts need expression. Your calling needs context. And the body provides both—places to serve, people to serve, ways to contribute that develop you while helping others.

Diversity of perspective. People from different backgrounds, different life experiences, different spiritual journeys see things you miss. Their insights challenge your assumptions, broaden your understanding, deepen your comprehension of God's multifaceted wisdom.

Supernatural love. When you love people who are different from you, difficult to love, or don't naturally mesh with your personality—that's supernatural. That's evidence of transformation. And it only happens in community, not isolation.

All of this contributes to sanctification in ways solitary spirituality never can. You need community. Not just for social connection (though that matters). For spiritual transformation. For preparation for glory.

Mutual Accountability and Growth

Now we need to address something uncomfortable: the necessity of accountability. Not accountability as control or spiritual abuse, but accountability as mutual submission for mutual growth.

Iron Sharpening Iron

Proverbs 27:17 gives us the metaphor: "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Iron sharpens iron. Not wood sharpening iron. Not plastic sharpening iron. Iron. Hard meeting hard. Resistance creating refinement. Friction producing edge.

When iron sharpens iron, sparks fly. There's heat. There's grinding. There's discomfort. The process isn't gentle. But the result is a sharper blade—more effective, more useful, better suited for its purpose.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is what Christian community does. We sharpen each other. Not through condemnation or criticism, but through loving truth-telling. Not through harsh judgment, but through honest observation. Not through controlling manipulation, but through mutual commitment to growth.

But for iron to sharpen iron, both pieces must be positioned for the grinding. You must allow others close enough to see your life. You must be honest enough for them to know your struggles. You must be humble enough to receive their input. You must be committed enough to the relationship to endure the friction.

This is why superficial community doesn't produce transformation. When relationships stay surface-level, there's no sharpening. When you hide your real life behind religious performance, there's no accountability. When you keep people at arm's length, there's no mutual growth.

Iron sharpening iron requires proximity, honesty, humility, and commitment. It requires letting others into your real life, not just your Sunday morning persona.

Bearing One Another's Burdens

But accountability isn't just about correction. It's about support. Galatians 6:1-2 instructs:

"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

Notice the gentleness. The humility ("looking to yourself"). The burden-bearing. This isn't harsh condemnation. It's loving restoration. It's recognizing we all struggle, we all stumble, we all need help.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Bearing burdens means:

- Entering into others' pain, not just observing from distance
- Carrying together what's too heavy to carry alone
- Providing practical help, not just spiritual platitudes
- Walking alongside through difficulty, not just offering advice
- Weeping with those who weep (Romans 12:15)
- Remaining committed when it's costly

This is transformation through community. When you let others bear your burdens—when you admit weakness, acknowledge struggle, ask for help—you're refusing the independence that isolates and embracing the interdependence that sanctifies.

And when you bear others' burdens—when you sacrifice time, energy, resources to help fellow believers—you're practicing the self-giving love of Christ. You're becoming more like Him through serving others.

Confession and Prayer

James 5:16 adds another dimension: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

Confess to one another. Not just to God (though that's essential), but to each other. Why? Because confession breaks isolation. It exposes sin to light. It invites others into your battle. It creates accountability that prevents repeated failure.

Sin thrives in secrecy. Darkness loves isolation. But when you bring sin into the light through confession to trusted brothers or sisters, you rob it of power. You invite help. You open the door for prayer, encouragement, and accountability.

This requires vulnerability. It requires trust. It requires humility to admit, "I'm struggling with this. I need help. Please pray for me." But this vulnerability is the pathway to healing.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

And notice: "pray for one another." Community isn't just confessing to each other. It's interceding for each other. Standing in the gap. Calling on God's power for others' battles. Believing together for transformation that individuals struggle to believe alone.

Practical Accountability

But what does healthy accountability actually look like?

First, it's mutual. Not one person holding another accountable while remaining unaccountable themselves. Both parties are committed to growth, both are honest about struggles, both receive input from the other.

Second, it's invited. Not forced. Not controlling. Not imposed. You choose people you trust and invite them to speak into your life. You give permission for honest observation.

Third, it's specific. Not vague promises to "do better." Specific commitment to specific behaviors with specific check-ins. "I commit to reading Scripture daily, and I'll text you each evening to report." Specific creates accountability; vague creates avoidance.

Fourth, it's grace-based. The goal isn't perfection. The goal is progress. The response to failure isn't condemnation but encouragement to return. "You failed? Okay, confess it, receive forgiveness, get back up. What do you need to do differently next time?"

Fifth, it's for growth, not control. Healthy accountability helps you become who God created you to be. Unhealthy accountability tries to make you into who someone else thinks you should be. One serves your sanctification; the other serves another's agenda.

Sixth, it's rooted in relationship. Accountability without relationship becomes cold performance monitoring. But when you're in genuine friendship—when people know you and love you—accountability becomes a gift, not a burden.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Iron sharpens iron. But only when both pieces of iron are willing to be shaped. Only when friction is embraced as refining, not resented as intrusive. Only when mutual growth takes priority over comfortable isolation.

Speaking Truth in Love

Now we come to one of the most challenging aspects of community: speaking truth when truth is difficult. Ephesians 4:15-16 instructs:

"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

The Truth and Love Balance

Notice: *truth in love*. Not truth without love—that's harshness. Not love without truth—that's compromise. Truth in love. Both. Always.

Some people are naturally truth-speakers. They see what's wrong and they say it. Bluntly. Directly. Without much concern for feelings. They value accuracy over sensitivity. Truth matters more than relationship.

Other people are naturally love-speakers. They value relationship over correction. They'd rather maintain peace than create friction. They avoid difficult conversations. They minimize problems to preserve harmony.

But Scripture calls us to both. Truth and love. Not one or the other. Both.

Truth without love is brutality. It wounds without healing. It exposes without restoring. It tears down without building up. It's knowledge without wisdom, accuracy without grace, rightness without relationship.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Love without truth is sentimentality. It affirms without correcting. It soothes without sanctifying. It maintains comfort at the cost of growth. It's niceness without holiness, peace without purity, acceptance without transformation.

Truth in love is both honest and kind. Both clear and compassionate. Both confronting and caring. It says hard things in humble ways. It speaks difficult truth from a posture of love, for the purpose of growth.

When to Speak

But how do you know when to speak truth and when to stay silent?

Speak when sin is destructive. If you see a brother or sister caught in sin that's destroying them or others, love requires speaking. Silence isn't kindness—it's cowardice masquerading as niceness.

Speak when you're in relationship. Don't correct strangers or casual acquaintances. Speak into lives where you've earned the right to be heard through consistent love and commitment.

Speak when you're personally responsible. If you're in leadership over someone, you have responsibility to address issues. If you're peers, some issues aren't yours to address—but some are, particularly when they affect community or when the person has invited your input.

Speak when the Spirit prompts. Sometimes you feel a burden to say something. That's often the Spirit's leading. Don't ignore it. But verify: Is this truly Spirit-led or just my preference? Is this for their good or my comfort?

Stay silent when you're judgmental. If your heart is critical, condemning, or superior—don't speak. Work on your own heart first. Remove the log from your own eye before addressing the speck in another's (Matthew 7:3-5).

Stay silent when you're gossiping. If you're talking about someone rather than to someone, you're gossiping, not helping. Truth-in-love speaks directly to the person, not about them to others.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

How to Speak

But speaking truth in love isn't just about whether to speak. It's about how to speak.

First, pray. Ask God for wisdom, for the right words, for the right timing, for a loving heart. Don't speak out of anger, frustration, or impatience. Speak from love cultivated through prayer.

Second, check your motives. Why are you saying this? To help them grow or to prove you're right? To serve their sanctification or satisfy your need to correct? If your motives are mixed (and they often are), acknowledge that to God and to them.

Third, start with affirmation. Remind them you love them, you're for them, you want their best. Ground the conversation in relationship before addressing the issue.

Fourth, be specific. Don't deal in generalities: "You're always negative." Give specific examples: "Yesterday when you talked about your job, I noticed significant bitterness. Can we talk about that?"

Fifth, listen. Truth-in-love isn't monologue. It's dialogue. State your observation, then listen. There might be context you don't know. Circumstances that explain behavior. Wounds that underlie patterns.

Sixth, speak humbly. "I might be wrong, but I've noticed..." "This is what I'm observing..." "I could be misreading this..." Humility creates space for the other person to hear without defensiveness.

Seventh, point to Scripture. Don't just share opinion. Ground your observation in biblical truth. "Scripture says..." This shifts authority from you to God's Word.

Eighth, offer help. Don't just identify problems—offer to help solve them. "How can I pray for you? What support do you need? Can we meet weekly to talk about this?"

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Receiving Truth

But speaking truth in love isn't enough. Someone must receive truth in humility. And that someone is often you.

When others speak hard truth to you, how do you respond?

First, listen without immediately defending. Your first instinct will be self-protection. Resist it. Listen. Consider. There might be truth even in imperfect delivery.

Second, assume good intent. Unless you have clear evidence otherwise, assume they're speaking from love, wanting your growth, trying to help.

Third, look for the kernel of truth. Even if 80% of what they're saying feels wrong, is there 20% that's accurate? Focus on that 20%. Learn from it.

Fourth, take time to process. You don't have to respond immediately. "Thank you for sharing that. I need time to think and pray about it. Can we talk again next week?"

Fifth, ask God for insight. "Lord, is this true? Is there something here I need to see? Give me wisdom to know what to receive and what to reject."

Sixth, consult Scripture. Does what they're saying align with God's Word? Use Scripture as your filter for evaluating input.

Seventh, consider the pattern. If multiple people are saying similar things, pay attention. When one person corrects you, they might be wrong. When three people say the same thing, it's probably true.

Eighth, respond with humility and gratitude. "Thank you for caring enough to say that. I'm going to take this seriously and work on it." Even if it stings, receive it graciously.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Colossians 3:16 says: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Teaching and admonishing. Both. In community. With wisdom. With thankfulness. This is transformation through truth spoken and received in love.

The Glory of Unity

Finally, we come to the ultimate expression of community: unity. Not uniformity—everyone thinking, looking, and acting identically. Unity—diverse people bound together in Christ, displaying His glory through their oneness.

The Prayer of Jesus

In John 17:22-23, Jesus prays something remarkable:

"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

Read that carefully. Jesus gave us His glory. Why? "That they may be one." The glory He shares with us is meant to produce unity.

And notice the purpose: "so that the world may know that You sent Me." Unity among believers is evidence to the watching world that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Our oneness demonstrates God's love, validates Christ's mission, and attracts others to the gospel.

This means disunity isn't just unfortunate—it's devastating to witness. Division among Christians contradicts Jesus's prayer. Conflict within the church undermines the gospel message. Bitterness between believers obscures Christ's love.

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But unity—genuine, costly, sacrificial unity among diverse believers—displays glory in a way nothing else can.

What Unity Looks Like

Psalm 133:1 celebrates: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

Good and pleasant. Not easy. Not natural. But good. Beautiful. God-honoring. Glory-revealing.

But what does this unity actually look like?

First, it's rooted in Christ. You can't manufacture unity through human effort. You can't force it through institutional pressure. Unity flows from shared life in Christ. When all members are connected to the Head, the body naturally moves together.

Second, it allows for diversity. Unity doesn't mean everyone is identical. It means diverse people—different personalities, different backgrounds, different gifts, different perspectives—are held together in Christ. The diversity isn't a problem to solve. It's richness to celebrate.

Third, it requires humility. Philippians 2:3-4 instructs: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Pride divides. Humility unites.

Fourth, it costs something. Unity requires forgiving when wronged. Bearing with annoying people. Choosing relationship over being right. Sacrificing preference for peace. It's costly. But worth it.

Fifth, it actively pursues peace. Ephesians 4:3 commands: "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Diligent. Actively working at it. Not passively hoping it happens.

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Sixth, it bears with differences. Romans 14 addresses disputable matters—areas where mature Christians disagree. Paul's instruction? Bear with one another. Don't judge. Don't despise. Accept differences on non-essential matters while maintaining unity on essentials.

Threats to Unity

But unity is constantly threatened. What undermines it?

Pride. Insisting on your way. Demanding agreement. Refusing to consider other perspectives. Pride says, "I'm right, you're wrong, end of discussion."

Gossip. Talking about people instead of to them. Spreading criticism. Dividing through innuendo. Proverbs 16:28 says, "A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends."

Unforgiveness. Holding grudges. Keeping score. Refusing to release past wrongs. Unforgiveness builds walls that prevent unity.

Selfish ambition. Using the church for personal advancement. Pursuing position over service. Creating factions around personalities. James 3:16 warns: "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."

Doctrinal compromise. Unity doesn't mean abandoning truth. Some issues are worth dividing over. False gospels. Denial of Christ's deity. Rejection of Scripture's authority. True unity requires agreement on essentials even while allowing disagreement on non-essentials.

Pursuing Unity

So how do you pursue unity while maintaining truth?

First, major on majors. Distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. Unite around gospel truth. Allow liberty on debatable matters.

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Second, assume good intent. When someone disagrees with you, assume they love Jesus and want His glory, even if you think they're wrong about this particular issue.

Third, speak directly. When conflict arises, go to the person privately (Matthew 18:15). Don't gossip. Don't triangulate. Don't create factions. Deal with issues directly and biblically.

Fourth, forgive quickly. Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." You've been forgiven much. Forgive others freely.

Fifth, pursue peace. Romans 12:18: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." You can't control others' responses. But you can control yours. Do your part.

Sixth, serve humbly. Nothing builds unity like serving together. When you're working side-by-side for kingdom purposes, petty differences fade. Shared mission creates shared heart.

Seventh, pray for unity. Ask God to create oneness. To soften hearts. To reveal blind spots. To produce humility. Unity is ultimately God's work. Ask Him for it.

Unity displays glory. Jesus said so. When the world sees believers—diverse in personality, background, preference—genuinely loving each other, sacrificing for each other, remaining united despite differences—they see something supernatural. They witness glory. They encounter evidence of transformation that points to the Transformer.

This is the community of glory. Not perfect people pretending they have it all together. Real people, broken and being healed, sinful and being sanctified, weak and being strengthened—together. Iron sharpening iron. Bearing burdens. Speaking truth in love. Pursuing unity.

And through this messy, costly, beautiful community, God prepares you for glory. He uses other believers to expose your blind spots, encourage your faith, sharpen your thinking, and shape your character.

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You can't do this alone. You were never meant to. You need the body. The body needs you. And together—only together—you're being built into a dwelling place for God's Spirit (Ephesians 2:22), being prepared for the glory that's coming.

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." — Romans 15:5-6 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 14

Suffering for Glory—The Path of the Cross

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." — 1 Peter 4:12-14 (NASB)

I need to tell you something the prosperity preachers won't: following Jesus will cost you something.

Not might cost you. Will cost you. Guaranteed. Without exception.

The cost might be different for each person. For some, it's persecution—literal suffering for faith. For others, it's the cost of obedience when obedience requires sacrifice. For others, it's trials that test and refine. For others, it's carrying crosses that never seem to get lighter.

But there will be a cost. There will be suffering. There will be difficulty. And if you've been told otherwise—if you've been promised health, wealth, and prosperity as guaranteed outcomes of faith—you've been lied to.

Jesus never promised ease. He promised a cross. He never guaranteed comfort. He guaranteed tribulation. He never said following Him would make life easier. He said it would make life harder—but infinitely more meaningful.

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This is the chapter nobody wants to read. This is the truth we'd rather avoid. This is the dimension of Christian living that gets left out of the marketing materials and the motivational sermons and the inspirational Instagram posts.

But this is reality: the path to glory runs through suffering. The way to the crown goes by way of the cross. The journey to resurrection requires dying. And there's no shortcut, no bypass, no way to skip the hard parts and jump straight to the glory parts.

Peter addresses believers who are suffering—some for their faith, some through general trials of life—and he says something shocking: "do not be surprised." Don't act like something strange is happening. Don't treat suffering as an anomaly. Don't assume something has gone terribly wrong just because you're experiencing hardship.

Suffering is normal. Expected. Part of the package. And here's the mystery: suffering is also formative. Productive. Preparatory. It's doing something in you that ease and comfort never could. It's preparing you for glory in ways prosperity never would.

This isn't masochism. This isn't glorifying pain for pain's sake. This isn't suggesting all suffering is good or that you should seek it out. But it is acknowledging what Scripture teaches clearly: God uses suffering as an instrument of sanctification. He allows trials that test, refine, and purify. He permits difficulties that produce endurance, character, and hope.

And somehow—mysteriously, paradoxically, almost incomprehensibly—your present suffering is producing future glory. Not just rewarded with future glory. Actually producing it. Creating it. Generating "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

This is the path of the cross. And while nobody chooses it willingly, everyone who walks it faithfully discovers something the comfortable Christians never learn: Christ is most present in suffering. His grace is most evident in weakness. His power is most clearly displayed in trials. And the glory being produced through suffering far outweighs the pain endured to produce it.

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Expected Suffering, Not Anomaly

Let's start by demolishing a lie: the idea that suffering means something has gone wrong with your faith.

That trials indicate God's displeasure. That difficulty suggests you're doing Christianity incorrectly.

This is prosperity gospel poison, and it's done incalculable damage. It makes people who are suffering feel abandoned by God, when in reality they're experiencing what Jesus promised all along.

Jesus's Clear Warning

Jesus didn't sugarcoat this. John 16:33 records His words: "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

"In the world you *have* tribulation." Not might have. Not could have if things go wrong. *Have*. Present tense. Certain. Guaranteed.

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. He knew what was coming—for Himself and for them. Betrayal. Denial. Crucifixion. Persecution. Martyrdom for most of them. He didn't lie to them. He didn't promise ease. He told them the truth: tribulation is coming.

But notice He also gave hope: "take courage; I have overcome the world." The tribulation is real and certain. But so is the victory. The suffering is guaranteed. But so is the triumph. You will face difficulty. But you serve the One who has conquered difficulty.

This isn't contradictory. This is the Christian paradox: suffering and victory, trials and triumph, tribulation and peace—all coexisting. You experience hardship in the world while experiencing peace in Christ. You endure difficulty externally while possessing security internally.

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Paul's Straightforward Reality

Paul is even more explicit. 2 Timothy 3:12 states flatly: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

All. Not some. Not the unlucky ones. Not those in certain locations or certain time periods. All. Every single person who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus will experience persecution.

The word for "persecuted" (diōkō) means to pursue, to harass, to oppress. It ranges from social rejection to physical violence. Not everyone experiences the same intensity, but everyone experiences some degree of opposition for living faithfully.

Why? Because godliness exposes ungodliness. Light exposes darkness. Truth confronts lies. When you live distinctly Christian lives in an anti-Christian culture, friction is inevitable. When your values contradict the world's values, conflict is unavoidable. When your allegiance to Christ supersedes allegiance to anything else, opposition is guaranteed.

This isn't paranoia. This is reality. If you're not experiencing any pushback for your faith—if following Jesus costs you nothing, requires no sacrifice, creates no tension with the surrounding culture—you might want to examine whether you're actually following Jesus or just adopting religious veneer.

The Surprise Element

But notice what Peter says: "do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, as though some strange thing were happening to you."

Why does he have to tell them not to be surprised? Because apparently they were surprised. Despite Jesus's warnings. Despite Paul's teaching. Despite clear biblical precedent. They were treating suffering as anomaly rather than expectation.

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We do the same thing. We know theologically that Christians suffer. But when suffering hits us personally, we're shocked. "Why is this happening to me? What did I do wrong? Where is God? Why isn't He protecting me?"

Peter says: stop being surprised. This isn't strange. This isn't unusual. This isn't evidence that something has gone terribly wrong. This is normal. Expected. Part of the journey.

The fiery ordeal isn't punishment. It's testing. Not to see if God approves of you (He does, in Christ), but to prove your faith authentic. Not to destroy you, but to refine you. Not to demonstrate your weakness, but to display God's strength through your weakness.

Different Types of Suffering

But we need to distinguish between different types of suffering, because Scripture does:

Suffering for righteousness. This is persecution specifically because of your faith. Social rejection because you won't compromise. Professional cost because you maintain Christian ethics. Family tension because you follow Christ. This is what 1 Peter 4:14 addresses: "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Suffering from trials. These are difficulties common to life in a fallen world. Illness. Loss. Disappointment. Hardship. James 1:2-4 addresses this: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

Suffering from consequences. Sometimes we suffer because of our own foolish choices. This isn't persecution or trial—it's reaping what we've sown. 1 Peter 4:15 warns: "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler." If you suffer because of sin, that's different from suffering for righteousness.

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Suffering in spiritual warfare. Sometimes suffering comes from direct satanic attack. Job experienced this. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was "a messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). This is real but ultimately under God's sovereign control.

Not all suffering is identical. But all suffering—when endured faithfully—can be used by God for sanctification. Even suffering that results from your own mistakes, God can redeem and use for your growth.

The point isn't to figure out which category your suffering fits in. The point is to understand that suffering in some form is normal, expected, and purposeful in the Christian life.

Glory in Present Suffering

Now we come to something that sounds almost insane: Paul tells us to rejoice in suffering. Not after suffering. Not despite suffering. In suffering.

Exulting in Tribulation

Romans 5:3 says: "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance."

Exult. Glory. Rejoice. In tribulations. This isn't stoic resignation. This isn't gritting your teeth and enduring. This is actual joy in the midst of difficulty.

How is this possible? Because of what tribulation produces. Because of what suffering accomplishes. Because of the transformation happening through the trial.

Paul gives the progression: tribulation → perseverance → proven character → hope. Suffering isn't random. It's productive. It's creating something. Producing qualities that can't be developed any other way.

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But let's be honest: this doesn't feel like rejoicing in the moment. When you're in the fire, when the trial is intense, when the suffering is acute—you're not usually thinking, "Oh good, this is producing perseverance!" You're thinking, "God, please make this stop!"

And that's okay. That's honest. Even Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me" (Luke 22:42). He didn't want the suffering. He asked for it to be removed. But then He added: "yet not My will, but Yours be done."

The rejoicing comes not from enjoying pain but from understanding purpose. Not from denying difficulty but from seeing beyond it. Not from pretending suffering doesn't hurt but from knowing suffering is producing something worth the pain.

Boasting in Weakness

Paul takes this even further in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10:

"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Boast about weaknesses. Well content with difficulties. This is upside-down from worldly thinking. The world boasts in strength. Paul boasts in weakness. The world pursues comfort. Paul is content with hardship.

Why? Because "power is perfected in weakness." Because "when I am weak, then I am strong." Because weakness is the platform where God's power is most clearly displayed.

When you're strong, people credit you. When you're weak but persevering, people credit God. When you're capable and everything goes smoothly, you get the glory. When you're obviously inadequate but functioning anyway, God gets the glory.

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This is why God allows—sometimes even orchestrates—circumstances that expose your weakness. Not to shame you. To display His strength through you. Not to prove you can't do it. To prove He can do it through you.

The Purpose of Pain

C.S. Lewis wrote: "God allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons that we could learn in no other way."

This is profound and true. Some lessons only come through suffering. Some character qualities only develop through difficulty. Some dimensions of knowing God only emerge through hardship.

You learn patience through waiting that tests you. You learn faith through circumstances that require trusting when you can't see. You learn dependence through weakness that forces you to rely on God. You learn compassion through experiencing pain that teaches you to comfort others.

Paul confirms this in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

The comfort you receive in suffering qualifies you to comfort others in their suffering. The lessons learned in trials equip you to guide others through trials. The faith exercised in difficulty prepares you to encourage others facing difficulty.

Nothing is wasted. No pain is purposeless. Every trial that's endured faithfully produces fruit that blesses you and others.

Present Glory, Not Just Future

But notice Peter's language in 1 Peter 4:14: "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

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The Spirit of glory rests on you. Present tense. Right now. In the suffering. Not just after the suffering. During it.

When you suffer for Christ's name—when you endure hardship specifically because of your faith—the Spirit of glory is upon you. There's a unique presence of God's glory in the midst of suffering for His sake. A special manifestation of His presence with those who bear reproach for His name.

This is what the early Christians experienced. Acts 5:41 says that after being beaten for preaching about Jesus, the apostles went away "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name."

Worthy to suffer. They considered persecution a privilege. An honor. Evidence that they were truly Christ's followers. And in that suffering, they experienced glory—the presence of God's Spirit in unique and powerful ways.

This doesn't make suffering pleasant. It makes suffering purposeful. It doesn't eliminate pain. It provides perspective that transforms how you experience pain.

Sharing Christ's Sufferings

But there's another dimension to Christian suffering that's often overlooked: when you suffer as a Christian, you're participating in Christ's own sufferings. You're sharing in what He experienced. You're entering into fellowship with Him at a level impossible to know through ease.

The Fellowship of His Sufferings

Philippians 3:10 captures Paul's desire: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

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Notice the order: know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, conformity to His death. It's all connected. You can't fully know Christ without knowing Him in suffering. You can't experience resurrection power without first entering death. You can't be conformed to Him without sharing His sufferings.

Fellowship (*koinōnia*) means participation, partnership, sharing. When you suffer—especially when you suffer for righteousness, for obedience, for faith—you're participating in what Christ experienced. You're sharing in His sufferings. You're partnering with Him in the pattern of suffering-then-glory that characterized His earthly life.

This is mysterious but profound. Your suffering isn't identical to His—His was redemptive, once-for-all, substitutionary. But there's a sense in which faithfulness that costs you something connects you to Christ's experience in a unique way.

You understand His rejection when you experience rejection for following Him. You comprehend His pain when you endure pain for His sake. You relate to His suffering when you suffer as He suffered—unjustly, yet faithfully, maintaining love and forgiveness even toward enemies.

Completing What Is Lacking

Paul says something startling in Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

What is lacking in Christ's afflictions? Nothing redemptive—His sacrifice was complete, sufficient, finished. But something experiential. Christ's body—the church—is still being formed. Still experiencing affliction. Still suffering in this world.

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And when individual members suffer, they're participating in the ongoing afflictions of Christ's body. They're completing, in their own experience, what Christ experienced corporately. They're sharing in the sufferings that are part of being Christ's body in a hostile world.

Your suffering isn't meaningless. It's not isolated. It's part of the larger story of Christ's body experiencing what the Head experienced—rejection, persecution, suffering—on the way to ultimate glory.

Suffering for Others

But notice Paul's phrase: "I rejoice in my sufferings *for your sake*." His suffering served others. Benefited the church. Advanced the gospel.

When you suffer faithfully—when you endure trials without becoming bitter, when you face persecution without retaliating, when you maintain joy in hardship—you're encouraging others. Strengthening them. Showing them it's possible to persevere. Demonstrating that faith works even when life is hard.

Your faithful suffering serves the body. It builds up other believers. It displays the reality of Christ to a watching world. It proves the gospel isn't just feel-good philosophy but transformative truth that sustains through actual difficulty.

This doesn't make suffering easy. But it makes suffering meaningful. You're not just enduring for yourself. You're enduring for others. Your perseverance encourages them. Your faithfulness strengthens them. Your testimony gives them hope.

The Pattern of Christ

But fundamentally, suffering for righteousness conforms you to Christ's pattern. He suffered unjustly. He was rejected by those He came to save. He endured betrayal, mockery, physical agony, and death. And He did it all for others, motivated by love, sustained by the joy set before Him.

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When you suffer for His sake—when you're misunderstood, rejected, opposed because of your faith—you're walking the path He walked. You're following His example. You're being conformed to His image not just in character qualities but in experience.

This is the highest privilege available to believers: to share in Christ's sufferings. To participate in His experience. To know Him not just in resurrection power but in crucifixion pain. To be so identified with Him that His path becomes your path, His suffering becomes your suffering, His glory becomes your glory.

This is what Paul meant when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). Not just positionally, but experientially. Not just legally, but practically. When you suffer for Christ, you're living out the crucified life. You're dying with Him so you can live with Him.

The Revelation Perspective

But now we need to address the ultimate perspective on suffering: the eternal weight of glory it produces.

Not Worthy to Compare

Romans 8:18 provides the framework: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Not worthy to compare. Not even close. Not in the same category. Not on the same scale. The sufferings—real, painful, difficult—are lightweight and temporary compared to the glory—weighty and eternal.

Paul isn't minimizing present suffering. He's contextualized within eternal reality. Yes, it hurts now. Yes, it's hard now. Yes, it feels overwhelming now. But "now" is temporary. "Now" is momentary compared to eternity. And what's being produced through this temporary, momentary suffering is glory so magnificent that the suffering won't even register in comparison.

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Think of childbirth. The pain is real, intense, agonizing. But once the child is born, the pain is forgotten in the joy of the baby. The suffering served a purpose. It produced something worth the pain. And afterward, the mother would say the pain was worth it.

This is the perspective Scripture gives us on suffering. It's producing something. Creating something. Generating glory that makes the pain worth enduring.

Eternal Weight of Glory

2 Corinthians 4:17 expands this: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

Notice the contrasts:

- Momentary vs. eternal
- Light vs. weighty
- Affliction vs. glory

Your suffering is temporary. The glory is eternal. Your affliction is light (from an eternal perspective). The glory is weighty. What you're experiencing is painful. What you're receiving is glorious.

But notice the active verb: "is producing." Present continuous tense. Right now, as you suffer, glory is being created. The suffering isn't just endured until you get to glory. The suffering is actively producing glory.

This is mysterious. How does present suffering produce future glory? How does earthly pain create heavenly reward? How does temporal difficulty generate eternal weight?

Scripture doesn't fully explain the mechanics. But it declares the reality: your faithful suffering produces glory. Not just rewarded with glory. Actually produces it. Creates it. Generates it. The suffering is the means by which glory is being formed, fashioned, brought into being.

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Looking to the Unseen

But how do you maintain this perspective when suffering is immediate and glory is future? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:18: "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Look not at what's seen (present circumstances, current suffering, temporal difficulty) but at what's unseen (future glory, eternal reality, promised reward).

This is faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines it: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith sees what can't yet be seen. Faith is convinced of realities not yet experienced. Faith trusts promises not yet fulfilled.

When suffering is intense, you can only endure through faith that sees beyond present pain to future glory. Through conviction that what God has promised, He will accomplish. Through assurance that the glory coming far outweighs the suffering endured.

This isn't denying present reality. It's viewing present reality through the lens of eternal reality. It's acknowledging pain while also acknowledging purpose. It's experiencing suffering while maintaining hope.

The Day of Revelation

But notice Peter's phrase in 1 Peter 4:13: "so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

At the revelation of His glory. There's a specific day coming. A moment when Christ's glory is fully revealed. When everything hidden becomes manifest. When all purposes are made clear. When every question is answered.

On that day, when you see Him in His glory, when you're revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4), when the glory produced through your suffering is fully manifested—on that day, you will rejoice with exultation.

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Not just regular joy. Exultation. Overwhelming gladness. Extreme delight. Joy so intense that all the suffering that produced it seems trivial by comparison.

This is the hope that sustains through suffering. The day is coming. Glory is coming. Revelation is coming. And on that day, every tear will be worth it. Every trial will make sense. Every suffering will be shown to have produced something infinitely more glorious than the pain endured.

Enduring Suffering Faithfully

So how do you actually suffer faithfully? How do you endure trials without becoming bitter? How do you maintain hope when pain is real and relief isn't immediate?

First, remember it's expected. Don't be surprised. Don't treat suffering as evidence that something has gone wrong. This is the path Jesus walked. This is the path His followers walk. Suffering is normal for Christians.

Second, see it as purposeful. God is using this. Producing something. Refining you. Preparing you. Nothing is wasted. No pain is pointless. Even when you can't see the purpose, trust that it exists.

Third, share Christ's sufferings. See your suffering as participation in His experience. As fellowship with Him in a unique way. As conformity to His pattern. This connects your pain to His purpose.

Fourth, maintain eternal perspective. Look beyond present difficulty to future glory. Remember the suffering is momentary and light compared to the eternal weight of glory being produced. Fix your eyes on what's unseen, not just what's seen.

Fifth, lean into community. Don't suffer alone. Let others bear your burdens. Receive prayer, encouragement, practical help. The body is meant to function together, especially in suffering.

Sixth, continue obeying. Don't let suffering derail faithfulness. Keep following Jesus even when it's costly. Keep choosing right even when it's painful. Faithfulness in suffering is what produces the glory.

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Seventh, guard against bitterness. This is crucial. Suffering can make you bitter or better. The difference is how you respond. Keep short accounts with God. Process pain honestly. But refuse bitterness.

Eighth, trust God's sovereignty. He hasn't lost control. He hasn't abandoned you. He's with you in the fire. He's working all things—even this—for your good (Romans 8:28).

Ninth, look for grace. God provides sufficient grace for every trial (2 Corinthians 12:9). Look for it. Receive it. His grace is enough—not to remove the trial, but to sustain you through it.

Tenth, keep worshiping. Worship isn't dependent on circumstances. Worship transcends circumstances. Keep praising even when it hurts. Keep declaring truth even when you don't feel it. Worship reorients your perspective.

Eleventh, minister to others. Even in your suffering, you can serve. Comfort others with comfort you've received. Encourage those further behind in the journey. Your suffering qualifies you to minister to others suffering.

Twelfth, watch for glory. Look for ways God is already manifesting His glory through your suffering. Notice His presence. Recognize His provision. See His work. Glory isn't just future—it's breaking into present through your faithful endurance.

The path to glory runs through suffering. There's no way around it. No shortcut that bypasses the cross. No prosperity gospel that promises ease without cost.

But the path, though difficult, is worth walking. Because the glory being produced through your suffering far exceeds the suffering endured. Because the Christ you're sharing suffering with is also the Christ you'll share glory with. Because the faith being refined through trials is faith that will result in "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

Suffering is real. Pain is real. Difficulty is real. But so is purpose. So is glory. So is the promise that those who suffer with Christ will also be glorified with Christ (Romans 8:17).

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This is the path of the cross. It's costly. It's painful. It's difficult. But it leads to glory—not just future glory in heaven, but present glory as the Spirit of glory rests on you even in suffering. And ultimately, to the revelation of glory that will make every moment of suffering seem like momentary, light affliction by comparison.

Walk the path. Carry the cross. Endure the suffering. Trust the process. Watch for the glory.

It's coming. And it will be worth it.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."— Romans 8:18 (NASB)

PART FIVE: THE ULTIMATE GLORY

The Consummation

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 15

The Revealing of Sons—Glory Manifested

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."—

Romans 8:19-21 (NASB)

The universe is holding its breath.

All of creation—every mountain, every ocean, every star, every atom—is waiting. Watching. Longing. Groaning. Anticipating something that hasn't happened yet but is absolutely certain to happen.

What is creation waiting for? Not for Christ's return, though that's included. Not for the end of the world, though that's coming. Not for heaven, though that's our destination.

Creation is waiting for you. Specifically, for the revealing of who you truly are. For the manifestation of your full identity as a child of God. For the moment when the glory that's been hidden in you throughout this earthly journey is finally, fully, completely revealed.

This sounds almost blasphemous, doesn't it? Creation waiting for us? The universe groaning in anticipation of our glorification? How can this be? Aren't we supposed to be waiting for God to do something, not the other way around?

But this is exactly what Paul says. The whole creation is on tiptoe, eagerly expecting the unveiling of God's sons and daughters. Because when we are fully revealed in glory—when what's been hidden becomes manifest, when what's been concealed becomes visible, when what's been true but unseen becomes openly displayed—something cosmic happens. Not just for us, but for all of creation.

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This is the ultimate glory. The consummation. The completion of everything God has been doing from Genesis to now. Not just individual transformation, but cosmic restoration. Not just personal glorification, but universal renewal. Not just you being made perfect, but all things being made new.

We've spent fourteen chapters exploring how God prepares you for glory—transforming you from glory to glory, conforming you to Christ's image, sanctifying you through trials, refining you through fire. All of that has been preparation. Building toward something. Moving toward a goal. Progressing toward an ultimate destination.

This is that destination. This is where it's all been heading. This is the culmination of your preparation, the completion of your transformation, the consummation of God's eternal purpose.

And it's not just about you getting to heaven. It's about you being fully revealed as who you've always been in Christ but haven't yet fully manifested. It's about your hidden life becoming visible. Your true identity becoming obvious. Your glory—Christ's glory in you—becoming undeniable.

The universe is waiting for this. Creation is groaning for this. All of history is building toward this. And when it happens—when Christ appears and you appear with Him in glory—everything changes. Not just for you. For all of creation.

Creation's Anticipation

Let's start with this remarkable image: creation waiting. Not passively. Not indifferently. Waiting with "anxious longing." Waiting "eagerly." This is active, intense, hopeful anticipation.

The Personification of Creation

Paul personifies creation throughout Romans 8:19-23. He describes creation as if it has consciousness, awareness, desire. As if all of nature is a living entity capable of longing, groaning, hoping.

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This is more than poetic language. This is theological truth expressed through vivid imagery. Creation isn't literally conscious in the way humans are. But creation is affected by what happens to humanity. Creation's state is tied to humanity's state. And creation's ultimate destiny is linked to humanity's ultimate destiny.

Why? Because humans were created as God's image-bearers, given dominion over creation (Genesis 1:26-28). We were meant to rule creation as God's representatives—stewarding it, caring for it, cultivating it for His glory. But when humanity fell, creation fell with us. When sin corrupted humans, creation became corrupted. When death entered through Adam's sin (Romans 5:12), creation became subject to decay, futility, corruption.

Creation wasn't subjected to futility because of its own failure. Romans 8:20 says it was subjected "not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it." God subjected creation to futility as a consequence of human sin. Creation didn't rebel—humans did. But creation bore the consequences.

Ever since, creation has been groaning under the weight of corruption. Experiencing the effects of sin it didn't commit. Suffering the consequences of rebellion it didn't participate in. Waiting for the restoration that can only come when God's image-bearers are fully restored.

The Groaning of Creation

Romans 8:22 intensifies the image: "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now."

Groans. The Greek word (*systemazō*) means to groan together, to sigh together in pain. And the specific kind of groaning? Childbirth pains.

This is significant. Childbirth groaning isn't despair groaning. It's not death-agony groaning. It's birth-pangs groaning. It's groaning that anticipates new life. Groaning that precedes delivery. Groaning that signals something is about to emerge.

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A woman in labor groans not because hope is lost but because hope is arriving. She groans not because nothing is happening but because something tremendous is happening. The groaning is evidence that birth is imminent, that new life is coming, that the long wait is almost over.

This is creation's groaning. Not hopeless despair. Hopeful anticipation. Not terminal agony. Birth pangs. Creation is groaning because redemption is coming. Restoration is near. The revealing of God's sons is at hand.

Our Groaning Joins Creation's

But notice Romans 8:23: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

We groan too. Even though we have the Spirit—even though we've tasted the first fruits of glory, experienced initial transformation, received the down payment of our inheritance—we still groan. We still wait. We still long for completion.

Why? Because we're not fully glorified yet. We have new hearts but aging bodies. We possess eternal life but inhabit mortal flesh. We're children of God but we don't yet appear as what we will be. We're already saved but not yet fully experiencing all salvation entails.

So we groan. Not in despair, but in anticipation. Not in hopelessness, but in eager expectation. We groan like a woman in labor, knowing the birth is coming, the waiting is almost over, the full redemption is near.

And our groaning joins creation's groaning. We groan together. Humanity and creation both longing for the same moment—the revealing of the sons of God, when we are fully manifested as who we truly are and creation is liberated from its bondage to corruption.

The Triple Groaning

Actually, Romans 8 presents a triple groaning:

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Creation groans (v. 22): The whole created order experiencing the effects of sin, longing for liberation, waiting for the revealing of God's children.

We groan (v. 23): Believers experiencing the tension of already-but-not-yet, possessing the Spirit but awaiting full redemption, saved but not yet glorified.

The Spirit groans (v. 26): "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

All three groan. Creation, believers, and the Spirit. All three longing. All three anticipating. All three waiting for the same ultimate reality—the full revelation of glory.

This triple groaning creates a symphony of longing. A cosmic chorus of anticipation. Heaven and earth together waiting, groaning, expecting the moment when what has been prepared will be fully revealed, when what has been promised will be completely realized, when what has been hidden will be entirely manifested.

The Full Revelation

But what exactly is being revealed? What has been hidden that will become manifest? What are we waiting for?

Already Children, Not Yet Revealed

1 John 3:2 captures the tension perfectly: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

Notice the already-but-not-yet:

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Already: "Now we are children of God." This is present reality. Current status. Accomplished fact. You are, right now, a child of God. Not becoming. Not trying to earn it. Not hoping to achieve it. You are.

Not yet: "It has not appeared as yet what we will be." Your full identity hasn't been revealed. What you will be isn't yet visible. The complete reality of your sonship/daughterhood isn't yet manifested.

Certainty: "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him." This is guaranteed. Certain. Absolutely sure. When Christ is revealed, we will be revealed. When He appears, we appear. When He is manifested in glory, we are manifested in glory.

This is the mystery of our current state. You are God's child right now. But you don't look like it yet. You don't fully experience it yet. You're not yet manifesting all that this identity entails. The fullness of what it means to be God's child is still hidden, still concealed, still not fully revealed.

But it will be. When Christ appears. When He comes in glory. When He is revealed. On that day, you will be revealed with Him. Your hidden identity will become visible. Your concealed glory will become manifest. What has always been true but not always apparent will become undeniably obvious.

Hidden with Christ

Colossians 3:3-4 expands this: "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Your life is hidden. Right now. This moment. Your truest identity, your deepest reality, your ultimate destiny—it's all hidden with Christ in God.

Hidden means concealed, not yet visible, not yet manifested. Like treasure buried in a field (Matthew 13:44). Like a seed buried in soil. Like a child hidden in the womb. It's there. It's real. It's growing. But it's not yet revealed.

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Where is it hidden? With Christ. In God. The most secure location imaginable. Not just in Christ, but in God. Multiple layers of divine security. Nothing can touch it. Nothing can steal it. Nothing can destroy it. Your life, your glory, your ultimate identity is hidden in the safest place in the universe—in Christ, who is in God.

But hidden doesn't mean lost. Hidden means waiting to be revealed. And the revealing happens when Christ is revealed. When He appears, you appear. When He is manifested, you are manifested. When He comes in glory, you come in glory.

Not because you're generating your own glory. Because His glory is your glory. His life is your life. His identity is wrapped up with your identity. You're so united with Him that when He appears, you can't help but appear with Him. When He's revealed, you're revealed. When He's glorified, you're glorified.

Like Him Because We See Him

But notice the mechanism in 1 John 3:2: "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

Like Him. Conformed to His image. Bearing His likeness. Reflecting His character. This is the completion of what began at conversion and has been progressing through sanctification—being transformed into Christ's image from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

But why will we be like Him? "Because we will see Him just as He is."

Seeing produces becoming. Beholding creates transformation. Gazing at Christ's glory changes us into His likeness. This has been true throughout the Christian life—as we've looked at Christ through Scripture, through worship, through meditation, we've been progressively transformed. But that seeing has been partial, limited, "in a mirror dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

But when we see Him face to face. When we behold Him as He actually is, not just as He's revealed in Scripture or glimpsed in moments of worship. When we see Him in full, unveiled, unfiltered glory—that seeing will complete the transformation. Instantly. Fully. Completely.

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One look at Christ in His full glory will accomplish what a lifetime of sanctification has been moving toward.

One glimpse of Him as He truly is will finish the work of conforming you to His image. One encounter with unmediated glory will perfect what has been in process.

This isn't magic. This is the culmination of a principle that's been true all along: you become like what you behold. And when you finally behold Christ in His full glory, you become fully like Him. The seeing produces the being. The revelation creates the transformation. The manifestation generates the glorification.

No More Hiding

But there's another dimension to this revelation. Not just us seeing Christ, but us being seen. Our true identity being revealed to the universe. Our hidden glory becoming visible to all.

Right now, the world doesn't see you as you truly are. They see the earthen vessel, not the treasure. They see the weakness, not the glory. They see the external appearance, not the internal reality. Even you don't fully see yourself as you truly are. You see the struggles, the failures, the weaknesses more clearly than you see the Christ who dwells in you.

But when Christ is revealed, you're revealed. The veil is removed. The concealment ends. What has been hidden becomes manifest. What has been true but invisible becomes obviously, undeniably, gloriously visible.

The universe will see you as you truly are: a child of God. An heir of Christ. A bearer of divine glory. A partaker of divine nature. A temple of the Holy Spirit. A new creation. A citizen of heaven. A co-heir with Christ. A member of His body. A bride prepared for her Bridegroom.

All of this has been true. But hidden. Concealed. Not yet fully manifested. On that day, it becomes revealed. Obvious. Undeniable. The universe will see what God has always seen: His beloved children, conformed to the image of His Son, bearing His glory, manifesting His character.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Liberated for Glory

Now we come to a dimension of glorification that's often overlooked: freedom. Glorification isn't just about gaining something (glory, perfection, immortality). It's also about being liberated from something (sin, death, corruption, limitation).

Creation Set Free

Look again at Romans 8:21: "that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Set free. Liberated. Released from bondage. Creation isn't just waiting passively. Creation is waiting to be freed. From what? "Slavery to corruption."

Corruption (phthora) means decay, destruction, dissolution. Everything in creation is subject to this. Mountains erode. Oceans rise and fall. Stars burn out. Animals age and die. Plants grow and wither. Entropy increases. Order moves toward disorder. Life tends toward death.

This isn't how God created things. This is the result of the curse (Genesis 3:17-19). When sin entered through humanity, creation became subject to futility and corruption. Death became part of the natural order. Decay became inevitable. The second law of thermodynamics—entropy always increases—became reality.

But this slavery to corruption isn't permanent. Creation will be set free. Liberated. Released. And notice when this happens: when God's children are glorified. When we are fully revealed. When our redemption is complete. Creation's liberation is tied to our glorification.

Why? Because we were created as God's image-bearers, given dominion over creation. When we're fully restored to what God intended us to be, creation is restored too. When we're freed from corruption, creation is freed. When we're glorified, creation participates in that glorification.

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Freedom of Glory

But notice the phrase: "the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Freedom *of* glory. Not freedom *from* glory. Not freedom *to* glory. Freedom *of* glory. Glory itself is characterized by freedom. Glory and freedom are inherently connected. Where true glory exists, freedom exists. Where full freedom exists, glory exists.

This makes sense. Sin enslaves. Glory liberates. Corruption binds. Glory frees. Death imprisons. Glory releases. The fullness of glory—God's glory fully manifested in His children—brings the fullness of freedom.

What will we be free from?

Free from sin. Not just forgiven (we already are). Not just struggling against sin (we currently are). Completely, totally, finally free from sin's presence. No more temptation. No more internal battle. No more old nature. No more flesh warring against the Spirit. Sin will be gone. Completely. Forever.

Free from death. 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 promises: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" Death—the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26)—will be destroyed. We'll have resurrection bodies that can't die, can't decay, can't be destroyed.

Free from corruption. Our bodies won't age. Won't deteriorate. Won't weaken. Won't experience pain, disease, disability, or decay. Immortal. Imperishable. Incorruptible. Beyond the reach of entropy.

Free from limitation. We'll know as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:12). We'll be able to worship without distraction. Love without selfishness. Serve without exhaustion. Joy without sorrow. Peace without anxiety.

Free from separation. No more distance from God. No more veil. No more barrier. Perfect, unmediated communion. Face-to-face fellowship. Complete unity. Total oneness.

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This is the freedom of glory. Not freedom to do whatever we want (that's often slavery, not freedom).

Freedom to be fully who God created us to be without any hindrance, limitation, corruption, or constraint.

The Goal and Purpose of All Things

Jonathan Edwards wrote: "The glory of God is the goal and purpose of all things."

Everything God has done from creation to consummation has one ultimate goal: His glory. Everything He's doing in you right now has one ultimate purpose: His glory. Everything He will do when Christ returns has one ultimate aim: His glory.

But here's what's remarkable: your glorification is part of God's glorification. Your transformation displays His power. Your freedom demonstrates His victory. Your perfection reflects His character. Your joy in Him increases His glory.

God doesn't glorify Himself at your expense. He glorifies Himself through your glorification. He doesn't diminish you to magnify Himself. He magnifies Himself by perfecting you. His glory and your good are not competing interests. They're completely aligned.

When you're fully glorified—when you're completely free from sin, death, and corruption—God receives maximum glory. When you're perfectly reflecting Christ's image, God is perfectly honored. When you're experiencing fullness of joy in His presence, God is perfectly glorified.

This is why glorification is both God-centered and deeply personal. It's all for His glory. But His glory is magnificently displayed through your complete restoration, perfect freedom, and eternal joy.

Cosmic Restoration

But let's expand the scope even further. Your glorification isn't just about you. It's not even just about creation being freed from corruption. It's about the restoration of all things. Cosmic renewal. Universal redemption. Everything made new.

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The Period of Restoration

Acts 3:21 speaks of Christ "whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."

The period of restoration of all things. Not just some things. Not just spiritual things. Not just human things. All things. Everything God created that was corrupted by sin will be restored. Everything that was broken will be fixed. Everything that was lost will be found. Everything that was wrong will be made right.

The Greek word translated "restoration" (apokatastasis) means reconstitution, reestablishment, restoration to original state. This isn't just repair. This is renewal. This isn't just fixing what's broken. This is making all things new (Revelation 21:5).

What does this include?

The physical universe. 2 Peter 3:13 promises: "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." Not the annihilation of the current heavens and earth, but their renewal, purification, transformation. The same creation subjected to futility will be liberated into glory.

Our bodies. Not disembodied spiritual existence, but embodied resurrection life. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 describes resurrection bodies as imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual. Physical bodies transformed, perfected, glorified—suited for eternal existence in a renewed creation.

Relationships. All the brokenness, dysfunction, pain in human relationships—healed. Restored. Perfected. Unity without division. Love without selfishness. Community without conflict. Fellowship without barriers.

Justice. All wrongs righted. All injustices corrected. All oppression ended. All victims vindicated. All evil judged. Perfect justice finally, fully, completely administered.

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Knowledge. Mysteries revealed. Questions answered. Confusion clarified. "For now we know in part, but then we will know fully just as we also have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Purpose. Every person fulfilling the purpose for which they were created. Every gift fully expressed. Every calling completely realized. Every destiny perfectly achieved.

Already and Not Yet

But here's what's crucial to understand: this restoration has already begun. It's not just future. It's already underway.

2 Corinthians 5:17 declares: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

New creation has begun. In you. Right now. You're the first fruits of the new creation. The initial evidence of restoration. The down payment of cosmic renewal.

Every time a sinner is saved, new creation breaks into the old. Every time a believer is sanctified, restoration advances. Every time the gospel transforms a life, redemption spreads. Every time the church displays unity in diversity, the kingdom advances. Every time justice is done, mercy shown, love expressed —the new creation encroaches on the old.

Your transformation isn't just personal. It's cosmic. You're not just being prepared for the new creation. You're already participating in it. You're not just waiting for restoration. You're already experiencing it.

But it's partial. Incomplete. Not yet fully realized. You have the Spirit, but not the resurrection body. You're forgiven, but not yet sinless. You're saved, but not yet glorified. You're experiencing new creation, but still inhabiting the old creation.

This is the tension of the already-but-not-yet. Redemption has begun but isn't complete. Restoration is real but not yet final. The new creation is here but not yet fully realized.

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And all creation is waiting for the completion. For the full manifestation. For the moment when what's begun in part becomes complete in whole. For the revealing of the sons of God that signals the liberation of all creation.

Your Place in the Cosmic Story

Here's what you need to understand: you're not a bit player in this cosmic drama. You're central to it. Not because you're important in yourself, but because of who you are in Christ. Because you're a child of God. Because you bear His image. Because you're being conformed to Christ's likeness.

Creation is waiting for you. Not because of who you are, but because of whose you are. Not because you're impressive, but because you're image-bearers being restored to reflect the Image perfectly.

When you are revealed—when your hidden identity becomes manifest, when your full glory is displayed, when your complete transformation is visible—creation will be liberated. The curse will be lifted. Corruption will be reversed. Decay will be defeated. Death will be destroyed.

Your glorification triggers cosmic restoration. Your revelation precipitates universal renewal. Your completion initiates the making new of all things.

This doesn't make you the cause—God is the cause. But it makes you the occasion. The trigger. The signal. When God's children are fully revealed, all things are made new.

This should simultaneously humble you and fill you with hope. Humble you because it's not about your achievement—it's all grace. Fill you with hope because your story is part of the greatest story ever told—the story of God redeeming, restoring, and renewing all things.

Living in Light of the Revealing

So how do you live now in light of what's coming? How does the future revelation affect present living?

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First, remember your true identity. You are God's child. Right now. This is who you are, even if it's not yet fully revealed. Live from this identity, not for this identity.

Second, maintain eternal perspective. Present suffering is producing eternal glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Current struggles are temporary. Coming glory is eternal. Keep the proportions right.

Third, groan hopefully. It's okay to long for completion. It's right to groan for what's not yet here. But let your groaning be hopeful, not hopeless. Birth pangs, not death agony.

Fourth, participate in restoration. You're already part of new creation. Live like it. Pursue justice. Show mercy. Love enemies. Forgive offenders. Do good to all. Every act of kingdom living advances restoration.

Fifth, watch for glory breaking through. Even now, in the already-but-not-yet, glory breaks through. Moments when God's presence is tangible. Times when transformation is obvious. Instances when the kingdom touches earth. Notice them. Celebrate them. Let them fuel hope.

Sixth, long for the revealing. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). It's right to long for Christ's return. To anticipate the revealing. To watch for the day when all things are made new.

Seventh, live worthy of your calling. Ephesians 4:1 urges: "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." You're called to glory. Live accordingly.

The universe is waiting. Creation is groaning. The Spirit is interceding. And you—beloved child of God—are being prepared for the moment when your hidden life becomes manifest, your concealed glory becomes visible, your true identity becomes undeniable.

That moment is coming. Certainly. Inevitably. Gloriously. And when it comes, when Christ appears and you appear with Him in glory, all creation will be liberated into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Until then, groan hopefully. Wait eagerly. Live faithfully. And remember: what you will be has not yet appeared. But when He appears, you will be like Him, because you will see Him just as He is.

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The revealing is coming. And it will be glorious.

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." — Romans 8:19

(NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 16

Face to Face—The Beatific Vision

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known." — 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NASB)

There's a longing buried deep in every human heart that nothing in this world can satisfy.

It's the ache you feel when you encounter beauty so profound it makes you want to weep—but even as you experience it, you sense it's pointing toward something greater. It's the hunger that persists even after every earthly appetite is satisfied. It's the homesickness for a home you've never seen. It's the desire for intimacy so complete that even the deepest human relationship leaves you wanting more.

C.S. Lewis called it "the inconsolable longing." Augustine described it as restlessness that finds no rest until it rests in God. The medievals called it the *desiderium naturale*—the natural desire for the vision of God.

And Scripture tells us what this longing is for, what will finally satisfy it, what we've been made for all along: seeing God face to face.

Not through a glass darkly. Not in reflections and shadows. Not through mediators and intermediaries. Not in glimpses and hints. Face to face. Direct. Immediate. Unmediated. Personal. Complete.

This is called the beatific vision—from the Latin *beatus* (blessed) and *visio* (seeing). The blessed seeing. The vision that brings ultimate blessedness. The encounter that produces perfect joy. The sight that satisfies every longing.

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This is what you were made for. This is what every moment of your existence has been preparing you for. This is the culmination of all preparation for glory, the fulfillment of all transformation, the completion of all sanctification.

Everything we've discussed up to this point—being transformed from glory to glory, abiding in Christ, walking as light, suffering for glory, waiting for the revealing—all of it has been preparation for this moment. The moment when you see Him. Not partially. Not dimly. Not through mediation. But face to face. Directly. Clearly. Completely.

And in that seeing, you will be fully transformed. Finally satisfied. Completely known. Perfectly loved. Utterly fulfilled. Because you will see Him as He is. And seeing Him as He is, you will become fully like Him. And being fully like Him, you will finally, fully, completely be who you were always meant to be.

This is the beatific vision. And it's not just future hope—it's present longing that shapes how you live now, what you pursue now, where you find joy now.

From Partial to Complete

Paul contrasts our current state with our future state using a simple but profound comparison: "now...then." Now we see dimly. Then we'll see clearly. Now we know in part. Then we'll know fully. Now we walk by faith. Then we'll walk by sight.

The Mirror, Dimly

"For now we see in a mirror dimly." The Greek word translated "dimly" (*ainigma*) literally means "in a riddle" or "in an enigma." We see, but not clearly. We perceive, but through obscurity. We glimpse, but not fully.

In Paul's day, mirrors weren't like our modern glass mirrors. They were polished metal—bronze or silver—that gave a reflection, but an imperfect one. Somewhat distorted. Somewhat unclear. You could recognize yourself, but not with perfect clarity. You could see your features, but not in perfect detail.

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This is how we currently see God. We see Him, but not directly. We know Him, but not completely. We understand Him, but not fully. Our vision is mediated, limited, partial.

How do we currently see God?

Through Scripture. God's Word reveals Him, but it's revelation accommodated to human understanding. It's truth, but truth expressed in human language, through human authors, to human audiences. It's God speaking, but not God seen.

Through creation. Romans 1:20 says God's "invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made." Creation declares His glory, but it's declaration, not direct encounter. It points to Him, but it's not Him.

Through Christ. Jesus is "the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3). To see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9). But even the disciples who physically saw Jesus didn't see the fullness of His glory. That was veiled in flesh. Concealed in humility. Hidden in incarnation.

Through the Spirit. The Spirit dwells in us, communes with us, teaches us, reveals Christ to us. But even this most intimate presence is still mediated—Spirit to spirit, internal but not face to face.

Through other believers. We see Christ in each other. We encounter God's work through transformed lives. But we're earthen vessels—the treasure is there, but it's contained in cracked clay pots.

All of these are real ways of seeing God. True ways of knowing Him. Genuine ways of encountering Him. But they're all partial. Incomplete. Mediated. Like seeing in a dim mirror. Like knowing in riddles. Like perceiving through shadows.

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Walking by Faith, Not Sight

This is why 2 Corinthians 5:7 says "we walk by faith, not by sight." Right now, in this life, you don't see clearly enough to navigate by sight alone. You can't perceive God's presence, purposes, or plans with perfect clarity. You can't see Him face to face and let that direct vision guide every step.

Instead, you walk by faith. Trusting what's been revealed even when you can't see it fully. Believing promises you haven't yet experienced completely. Following Someone you know truly but don't yet see clearly. Obeying directions you understand partially but trust completely.

Faith is necessary precisely because sight is limited. If you could see perfectly, you wouldn't need faith. If God's presence were constantly visible, faith would be unnecessary. If every mystery were explained and every purpose clear, faith would have no object.

But this isn't deficiency. This is design. God ordained that you would walk by faith during this earthly pilgrimage precisely because faith pleases Him (Hebrews 11:6), faith is being refined (1 Peter 1:7), and faith is preparing you for sight.

The faith you exercise now is preparing you for the sight you'll experience then. The trust you develop in obscurity is training you for the intimacy you'll enjoy in clarity. The love you cultivate for the God you don't yet see is deepening your capacity for the God you will see face to face.

The Progression Toward Clarity

But notice: even now, you see. Partially. Dimly. But truly. You know God, even if you don't know Him fully. You encounter Him, even if not face to face. You experience Him, even if not in unmediated glory.

And the progression throughout your Christian life has been toward increasing clarity. Every encounter with God in Scripture increases your vision. Every experience of answered prayer clarifies your understanding. Every trial that proves His faithfulness sharpens your perception. Every act of worship deepens your sight.

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You see more clearly now than when you first believed. You know Him more fully now than at conversion.

You perceive Him more accurately now than in earlier seasons. The vision is still partial, still mediated, still dim—but it's clearer than it was. Sharper than it used to be. More focused than before.

This progression is itself preparation. Every glimpse of glory now is training for the full vision then. Every partial sight now is increasing capacity for complete sight then. Every dim reflection now is developing readiness for direct encounter then.

You're not just waiting for the beatific vision. You're being prepared for it. Your current encounters with God—however limited—are enlarging your heart, expanding your capacity, training your spiritual eyes for the day when you'll see Him face to face.

The Face of Glory

But what does it mean to see God's face? Why is this image—face to face—so central to Scripture's description of ultimate glory?

The Personal Nature of Faces

A face is personal. Individual. Unique. When you see someone's face, you're not just seeing their physical features. You're seeing their person. Their identity. Their emotional state. Their response to you.

Faces communicate. They express emotion, convey thought, reveal heart. You can know facts about someone without seeing their face. But to truly know them—to understand how they feel, what they're thinking, whether they're pleased or angry or sad or joyful—you need to see their face.

This is why "face to face" is the biblical language for intimate, personal relationship. Moses spoke with God "face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). This describes intimacy, directness, personal interaction. Not distant observation. Not formal ceremony. Personal conversation. Friend to friend. Face to face.

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The Aaronic Blessing

Numbers 6:24-26 gives us the Aaronic blessing that captures this beautifully:

"The LORD bless you, and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace."

Notice the progression: His face shining on you. His countenance lifted up on you. This is language of favor, pleasure, delight. When someone's face shines on you, they're pleased with you. When they lift their countenance toward you, they're giving you attention, favor, blessing.

This is what you'll experience in the beatific vision. Not just seeing God's face, but seeing His face shining on you. Not just beholding His countenance, but experiencing His countenance lifted up on you. Not just encountering Him, but encountering Him in His pleasure toward you, His delight in you, His joy over you.

They Will See His Face

Revelation 22:4 promises something that would have been unthinkable in the Old Testament: "they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads."

They will see His face. Not Moses alone. Not prophets only. Not special saints. All believers. You. Me. Every child of God. We will see His face.

This was forbidden in the Old Covenant. When Moses asked to see God's glory, God said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" (Exodus 33:20). God graciously allowed Moses to see His back, His afterglow, His passing glory—but not His face. Not directly. That would be fatal.

Why? Because unholy humanity cannot encounter holy divinity and survive. Because sin cannot stand in the presence of absolute purity. Because corrupt flesh cannot endure uncreated glory. To see God's face meant death.

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But in the New Covenant, through Christ's redemptive work, we are made holy. Purified. Perfected. Glorified. And in that glorified state—sinless, perfected, transformed—we can see His face. Not because God changed. Because we've been changed. Prepared. Made ready for what would have destroyed us in our former state.

And notice: "His name will be on their foreheads." Complete identification. Total belonging. Perfect union. You'll bear His name—not just externally, but as essential identity. You'll be marked as His, belonging fully to Him, identified completely with Him.

What We'll See

But what will we actually see when we see His face?

We'll see love. Infinite, perfect, personal love directed toward you. Not general benevolence toward humanity. Specific, individual, knowing love for you. The love that chose you before the foundation of the world. The love that gave His Son for you. The love that has sustained you through every trial. That love—visible in His face, readable in His expression, unmistakable in His countenance.

We'll see joy. Zephaniah 3:17 says God "will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." You'll see His joy. His delight. His pleasure in you. Not because you're inherently delightful (though you will be in your glorified state), but because you're His beloved child, united to His beloved Son, fully bearing His image.

We'll see beauty. Psalm 27:4 expresses David's deepest desire: "to behold the beauty of the LORD." God's beauty—not physical attractiveness, but the perfect harmony of all His attributes, the infinite excellence of His being, the radiant glory of His character—will be fully visible. And it will be more beautiful than anything you've ever imagined.

We'll see truth. Every question answered. Every mystery revealed. Every confusion clarified. In His face, you'll see truth itself—not propositions to be learned, but Reality to be encountered, Truth as Person, not just facts.

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We'll see ourselves reflected. When you see His face, you'll see yourself as He sees you. Not condemned. Not judged. Not disapproved. Loved. Delighted in. Perfected. Complete in Him. You'll see in His eyes the truth about your identity, your value, your place in His heart.

This is what face-to-face encounter means. Personal. Intimate. Direct. Unmediated. Complete.

Knowing as We Are Known

But Paul doesn't just talk about seeing. He talks about knowing. "Now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."

The Incompleteness of Current Knowledge

"Now I know in part." Literally, "out of part" or "from a fragment." Your current knowledge of God is partial. Incomplete. Fragmented. Like having pieces of a puzzle without seeing the whole picture. Like understanding parts of a story without grasping the complete narrative.

This isn't just about lacking information. It's about incomplete comprehension. You can know true things about God without knowing God fully. You can understand accurate doctrine without grasping the fullness of His character. You can believe right theology without experiencing the depths of His person.

Even your best moments of spiritual insight—even your deepest experiences of God's presence—are partial. They're real. True. Genuine. But incomplete. Like tasting a single grape and trying to comprehend the entire vineyard. Like hearing one note and attempting to understand the full symphony.

This can be frustrating. You long to understand more. To know Him better. To comprehend His ways more fully. But the limitation isn't just about information availability—it's about finite creatures attempting to know an infinite God. As long as you're finite, your knowledge will be partial. As long as you're created, you can't fully comprehend the Creator.

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Then: Full Knowledge

"But then I will know fully." Not partially. Not fragmentally. Fully. Completely. As fully as a finite being can know an infinite God.

This doesn't mean you'll become omniscient—you'll never know everything God knows. You'll never have infinite knowledge. You'll always be creature, never Creator. But you'll know Him fully in the sense that nothing will obscure your knowledge. No sin will cloud perception. No finite limitations will prevent understanding appropriate to glorified humanity. No questions will remain unanswered. No mysteries will remain perplexing.

You'll know Him as He truly is. Not through dim mirrors or partial glimpses, but in direct, unmediated, face-to-face knowledge. You'll understand His character fully. Comprehend His purposes completely. Grasp His ways entirely—not because you'll have infinite understanding, but because you'll have perfect understanding unobscured by sin, finitude, or limitation.

As We Are Known

But here's the profound part: "just as I also have been fully known."

God already knows you fully. Completely. Totally. Nothing about you is hidden from Him. Nothing about you surprises Him. Nothing about you is unknown to Him.

Psalm 139:1-4 declares:

"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all."

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He knows your thoughts before you think them. Your words before you speak them. Your actions before you perform them. Your motives behind your behaviors. Your wounds beneath your defenses. Your fears behind your facades. Your dreams, your desires, your desperations.

And in the beatific vision, you'll know Him the way He knows you. Not identically—He's God, you're not. But analogously. Proportionally. As fully as glorified humanity can know infinite divinity.

This is perfect intimacy. Being fully known and fully knowing. No secrets. No barriers. No misunderstandings. No distance. Complete transparency. Total openness. Perfect communion.

The Security of Being Fully Known

But here's what's remarkable: you're already fully known. Right now. And He loves you anyway.

He knows your worst sins—and He's forgiven them. He knows your deepest failures—and He's redeemed them. He knows your secret shames—and He's covered them. He knows your hidden struggles—and He's with you in them. He knows everything about you that you desperately hope no one ever discovers—and He loves you completely, unconditionally, eternally.

Being fully known by God is simultaneously terrifying and comforting. Terrifying because nothing is hidden—every secret exposed, every pretense stripped away, every mask removed. But comforting because being fully known means being fully loved. Not loved despite being known. Loved while being known. Loved because of being known—because He chose to set His love on you before you existed, knowing everything you would ever think, do, or be.

In the beatific vision, you'll experience this fully. You'll know yourself as He knows you—not with shame, but with His perspective. Not with condemnation, but with love. You'll see yourself through His eyes: beloved, chosen, perfected, complete in Christ.

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And you'll know Him as He knows you—not perfectly (you're not God), but proportionally (glorified humanity knows God as God knows humanity, each according to their nature). Complete knowledge appropriate to your glorified state. Full understanding without limitation or obscurity.

Heaven: A Prepared Place for Prepared People

D.L. Moody said: "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people."

This is profoundly true. Heaven isn't just waiting for you. You're being prepared for heaven. The beatific vision isn't just future hope. You're being made ready for it now.

Every moment of abiding in Christ is preparing you for face-to-face encounter. Every experience of transformation is enlarging capacity for glory. Every trial endured faithfully is training you for direct sight. Every instance of loving God without seeing Him clearly is developing capability to love Him when seeing Him clearly.

You couldn't handle the beatific vision in your current state. The unmediated sight of God's glory would overwhelm you. Destroy you. Like an ant trying to comprehend quantum physics or a newborn trying to run a marathon—you simply don't have the capacity yet.

But you're being prepared. Expanded. Enlarged. Transformed from glory to glory, developing capacity for the ultimate glory. Made ready through sanctification for the sight that requires holiness. Prepared through progressive transformation for the ultimate transformation that happens when you see Him face to face.

Satisfied in His Likeness

Finally, we come to the ultimate promise of the beatific vision: complete satisfaction. Not partial. Not temporary. Complete. Final. Eternal. Perfect satisfaction found in seeing God and being like Him.

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The Universal Quest for Satisfaction

Every human being is searching for satisfaction. For something that will finally, fully, completely fill the aching void inside. For the thing that will make them say, "Yes, this is it. This is what I've been looking for. I need nothing more. I'm satisfied."

Some seek it in pleasure—and find that pleasure is fleeting, leaving them hungrier than before. Some seek it in achievement—and discover that accomplishments are never enough, the next goal always beckoning. Some seek it in relationships—and learn that even the deepest human intimacy leaves longings unmet. Some seek it in possessions—and realize that things can never satisfy the soul.

Augustine was right: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Nothing created can satisfy a soul made for the Creator. Nothing finite can fill a heart designed for the Infinite. Nothing temporal can content a being made for eternity. Every earthly pleasure, every human achievement, every worldly success is too small, too limited, too temporary to satisfy the longing that only God can fill.

Awaking in His Likeness

Psalm 17:15 expresses the confidence of ultimate satisfaction: "As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake."

"I will be satisfied." Not "I might be satisfied." Not "I hope to be satisfied." I *will* be satisfied. Guaranteed. Certain. Absolutely sure.

When? "When I awake." This refers to the resurrection, the awakening from death's sleep into eternal life. When you wake in the resurrection, when you rise in your glorified body, when you open your eyes and see His face—that's when satisfaction comes.

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How? "With Your likeness." Not just seeing Him. Being like Him. Beholding His face and being transformed into His likeness. Seeing Him as He is and becoming like Him in seeing (1 John 3:2).

The satisfaction isn't just observing glory. It's participating in glory. It's not just admiring perfection. It's being perfected. It's not just seeing holiness. It's being holy. The beatific vision simultaneously reveals God to you and conforms you to God. In seeing Him, you become like Him. And in becoming like Him, you find the satisfaction your soul has always craved.

Nothing More Needed

When you see God face to face, you'll need nothing else. Want nothing else. Desire nothing else. Not because other good things cease to exist, but because you've found the Source of all good things. The Fountain from which every lesser pleasure flows. The Reality of which every earthly joy is merely shadow.

Every longing that's never been satisfied will be fulfilled. Every ache that's never been relieved will be healed. Every hunger that's never been filled will be satisfied. Every thirst that's never been quenched will find refreshment.

You'll look at Christ in His glory and say with complete honesty, complete joy, complete satisfaction: "This. This is what I've always wanted. This is who I've always needed. This is the joy I've always sought. And it's infinitely better than I ever imagined."

Eternal, Not Fading

But unlike every earthly satisfaction that fades—the meal that satisfies today but leaves you hungry tomorrow, the pleasure that thrills today but bores you next week, the achievement that excites today but feels hollow next year—this satisfaction never fades.

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Because the source of satisfaction is eternal, unchanging, infinite. God doesn't diminish. His glory doesn't fade. His beauty doesn't tarnish. His love doesn't cool. You'll behold Him for ten thousand years and He'll be as fresh, as glorious, as satisfying as the first moment. And after ten million years, you'll still be discovering new dimensions of His character, new depths of His love, new facets of His glory.

The beatific vision isn't static. It's dynamic. Not boring repetition but infinite exploration. Not exhausting one limited source but drinking from an unlimited fountain. Not finishing a finite book but reading an infinite library where every page reveals something new, something wonderful, something that satisfies yet creates capacity for more.

This is why Revelation 22:4 says simply, "they will see His face." Present, continuous tense. Not "they saw His face once." Not "they will have seen His face." They *will see* His face. Ongoing. Continuous. Forever. An eternal present of face-to-face encounter that never grows old, never becomes routine, never loses its power to satisfy, delight, transform.

Beyond Comprehension

But here's what you need to understand: you can't fully comprehend this now. You can't imagine what it will be like to be fully satisfied. To have every longing met. Every ache healed. Every hunger filled. To need nothing. Want nothing beyond what you have. Desire nothing more than what you're experiencing.

Because you've never experienced that. Every satisfaction you've known has been partial, temporary, limited. You've never known perfect, complete, eternal satisfaction. You have no reference point. No basis for comparison. No experience to draw from.

This is why 1 Corinthians 2:9 says: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."

The satisfaction of the beatific vision is beyond your imagination. Better than your wildest dreams. More wonderful than your highest hopes. Infinitely exceeding anything you've ever experienced or conceived.

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But even now, in your partial sight and incomplete knowledge, you can taste hints of it. Glimpses. Foretastes. Every moment of joy in God's presence—however brief. Every instance of satisfaction in worship—however fleeting. Every experience of peace in prayer—however temporary. These are previews. Appetizers. Samples of the feast that's coming.

And if the glimpses are this good, imagine the full vision. If the foretastes are this satisfying, imagine the complete meal. If the previews move you this deeply, imagine the full revelation.

Living Toward Face to Face

So how do you live now in light of the face-to-face encounter that's coming?

First, cultivate longing. Don't suppress the ache for something more. Don't try to fully satisfy it with created things. Let the longing drive you to God. Let the dissatisfaction with earthly things increase your hunger for heavenly things.

Second, pursue present encounters. You can't see Him face to face yet, but you can seek His face now. You can encounter Him in Scripture, in worship, in prayer, in communion. Every encounter now is preparation for the ultimate encounter then.

Third, practice seeing Christ in Scripture. The Word reveals His face. Learn to see Him there. Not just learn about Him, but encounter Him. Not just study His character, but behold His glory—even if dimly, even if partially.

Fourth, let earthly beauties point beyond themselves. Every sunset, every mountain vista, every beautiful piece of music, every loving relationship—let them be signs pointing to the Ultimate Beauty you'll behold face to face.

Fifth, develop holy dissatisfaction. Don't settle for lesser satisfactions. Don't let earthly pleasures fully satisfy you. Enjoy them—they're good gifts—but let them create hunger for the Giver, not just satisfaction with the gifts.

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Sixth, walk by faith confidently. You don't see clearly yet, but what you see is true. You don't know fully yet, but what you know is accurate. Walk confidently in partial sight, knowing complete sight is coming.

Seventh, prepare for face-to-face intimacy. The beatific vision is personal, intimate encounter. Prepare for it by deepening intimacy with God now. Let Him know you fully—drop the masks, abandon the pretenses, practice transparency before Him.

Eighth, watch for His face shining on you now. Even now, before the face-to-face encounter, you can experience His favor, His pleasure, His delight. In answered prayer. In unexpected provision. In His presence in trial. Watch for His face shining on you even through the dim mirror.

Ninth, remind yourself: this isn't all there is. When current sight is dim and current knowledge partial, remember: this is temporary. Full sight is coming. Complete knowledge awaits. Perfect satisfaction is certain.

Tenth, let this hope sanctify you. 1 John 3:2-3 says: "when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Hope of seeing Him face to face should motivate holiness now.

The beatific vision is coming. Face-to-face encounter with God is certain. Complete knowledge is guaranteed. Perfect satisfaction is promised. Being fully like Him is assured.

Until then, you see dimly. You know partially. You walk by faith. But you're not walking blindly. You're not hoping baselessly. You're not longing pointlessly.

Because the One you long to see face to face is already preparing you for that sight. The One you'll know fully is already knowing you fully. The One who will finally, completely satisfy is already satisfying you partially—giving you enough to sustain, but not so much that you stop longing for more.

And one day—certain day, coming day, glorious day—you'll wake. You'll open your eyes. You'll see His face. And in seeing Him as He is, you'll be like Him. And in being like Him, you'll be satisfied.

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Completely. Finally. Eternally. Perfectly. Satisfied.

Face to face.

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." — 1 John 3:2 (NASB)

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CHAPTER 17

Glorified Bodies—The Resurrection Hope

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." — Philippians 3:20-21 (NASB)

Your body matters to God.

I know this might sound obvious, but it's a truth many Christians functionally deny. We treat our bodies as temporary inconveniences. We speak of "going to heaven" as if we'll be disembodied souls floating on clouds. We talk about being "spiritual" as if that means escaping the physical. We long for the day when we'll finally be free from these weak, aging, decaying bodies.

But here's what Scripture actually teaches: God created you as an embodied being. He declared the physical creation, including human bodies, "very good" (Genesis 1:31). When God the Son became human, He took on a body—and He still has that body in His glorified state. And when He returns, He's not rescuing you from your body. He's redeeming your body. Transforming it. Glorifying it. Making it fit for eternal existence in the new heavens and new earth.

The Christian hope is not escape from physicality. It's resurrection into glorified physicality. Not freedom from the body. Transformation of the body. Not disembodied spiritual existence. Embodied eternal life in a renewed creation.

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This matters more than you might realize. How you think about your body affects how you treat it now. How you understand resurrection shapes how you face death. How you view your future body influences how you steward your current body. And what you believe about physical resurrection reveals what you believe about God's intentions for His creation.

The gospel isn't just "Jesus saves your soul." The gospel is "Jesus redeems the whole person—body, soul, and spirit—for eternal life in a physical, renewed creation." Your body isn't trash to be discarded. It's a seed to be planted that will rise in unimaginable glory.

This is the resurrection hope. And it's far more wonderful, far more physical, far more tangible than most Christians imagine. Not just spiritual transformation. Physical transformation. Your actual body—your very flesh and bones—will be raised, transformed, glorified, and made fit for eternity.

Not a different body. Your body. Transformed beyond recognition yet somehow still you. Continuous with your current body yet discontinuous in its capabilities. Recognizably you yet incomparably greater than you've ever been.

This is what Paul means when he says Christ "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." Not destroy your body and give you a different one. Transform the body you have into something glorious. The same body that suffers now will be the body that reigns then. The same flesh that experiences weakness now will experience power then. The same physical form that dies will be the form that lives forever.

The Resurrection Promise

Let's start with the foundational promise: God will raise your body from the dead. Not just preserve your soul. Resurrect your body. This isn't speculative theology or hopeful thinking. This is explicit biblical promise, guaranteed by Christ's own resurrection.

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Sown and Raised

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 gives us the most detailed description of resurrection bodies in Scripture:

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

Notice the agricultural metaphor: sown and raised. Like planting a seed and harvesting a plant. The seed goes into the ground. It dies. It's buried in the dark soil. But what comes up isn't the seed—it's something far greater. A plant. A flower. A tree. Something that began as a tiny seed but emerges as something magnificent.

This is your body's destiny. It's sown—buried in death. But it will be raised—resurrected to new life. And what's raised is both continuous and discontinuous with what was sown.

Continuous: It's still your body. The seed that goes in is related to the plant that comes up. There's organic connection. Genetic continuity. When you're raised, you'll still be you. Recognizably, identifiably you. Not someone else. Not a generic replacement body. You.

Discontinuous: But the plant doesn't look like the seed. An oak tree doesn't resemble an acorn. A rose doesn't look like a rose seed. The form is radically different even though there's organic connection. Your resurrection body will be so transformed, so glorified, so different from your current body that the comparison almost breaks down—yet it will still be organically, essentially, identifiably you.

Four Contrasts

Paul gives us four specific contrasts between the body that's sown and the body that's raised:

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Perishable → Imperishable: Your current body is decaying. Even now, cells are dying. Aging is happening. Deterioration is inevitable. Death is certain. But your resurrection body will be imperishable. No decay. No aging. No deterioration. No death. Ever. Immortal. Eternal. Incorruptible. Beyond the reach of death forever.

Dishonor → Glory: Your current body experiences shame. Weakness. Humiliation. Disease. Disability. Limitation. It fails you. Betrays you. Embarrasses you. But your resurrection body will be glorious. Honorable. Beautiful. Reflecting the glory of the One who created it and the One who redeemed it. No more shame. No more humiliation. Only glory.

Weakness → Power: Your current body is weak. Fragile. Limited. It gets tired. Sick. Injured. Old. You can't run as fast as you want. Jump as high as you desire. Work as long as you need. But your resurrection body will be powerful. Not limited by fatigue, weakness, disease, or disability. Capable of whatever God intends embodied, glorified humans to do in the new creation.

Natural → Spiritual: This doesn't mean your resurrection body will be immaterial or non-physical. "Spiritual body" doesn't mean "non-physical body." It means a body fully animated by the Spirit, fully responsive to God, fully suited for spiritual realities. Your current body is "natural"—animated by natural life, subject to natural laws. Your resurrection body will be "spiritual"—animated by the Spirit, subject to God's purposes, suited for eternal existence in God's presence.

The Dead in Christ Will Rise

But when does this happen? 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 gives us the timeline:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

At Christ's return. At the sound of the trumpet. At the voice of the archangel. At the shout of the Lord Himself. On that day—certain day, coming day, glorious day—the dead in Christ will rise.

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Notice: *the dead* will rise. Not just their souls continuing. Not just their spirits being preserved. The dead—those whose bodies are in graves, whose flesh has returned to dust, whose physical forms have decomposed—will rise. Bodies will be reconstituted. Flesh will be renewed. Physical forms will be restored. And then transformed. Glorified. Made imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual.

This is why Christian burial practices throughout history have emphasized care for the body. Not because the body itself is necessary for resurrection—God can resurrect from dust, from ashes, from atoms scattered across the universe. But because the body matters. It will be raised. It's not trash to be discarded but treasure to be transformed.

And notice the order: "the dead in Christ will rise first." Those who died before Christ's return get priority. They're not at a disadvantage. They haven't missed out. They rise first, then living believers are transformed ("we who are alive and remain"). Every believer—whether already dead or still alive at Christ's return—receives a glorified body. No one is left out. No one stays dead. No one remains in corruption.

This is the promise. Guaranteed. Certain. Your body will be raised. Not might be. Not hopefully will be. Will be. Absolutely, certainly, gloriously raised from death to eternal life.

Why Physical Resurrection Matters

But why does this matter? Why is physical resurrection essential rather than just soul preservation?

Because God created you as an embodied being. You're not a soul trapped in a body. You're a unified person—body and soul together. To be truly human is to be embodied. Disembodied existence isn't the goal—it's an intermediate state (present with the Lord, yes, but awaiting resurrection). Full humanity requires embodiment.

Because Christ's resurrection was physical. He didn't just spiritually survive death. His body was raised. The tomb was empty. He ate fish. He could be touched. He had scars. If Christ's resurrection was physical, ours will be too. He's the firstfruits—we follow the pattern He established.

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Because redemption includes all of creation. God isn't just saving souls from the world. He's saving the world—including physical bodies, physical creation, physical reality. If redemption left out the physical, it wouldn't be complete redemption.

Because the new heavens and new earth are physical. You're not being prepared for disembodied heaven. You're being prepared for embodied life in a renewed creation. And physical existence in a physical creation requires physical bodies.

Because bodies are good. God declared creation, including physical bodies, "very good." Sin corrupted bodies, but redemption restores them. Death threatens bodies, but resurrection defeats death. Bodies aren't problems to escape—they're part of creation to be redeemed.

This is why Christianity is radically different from Platonic philosophy or Eastern mysticism that treats the body as a prison and disembodied existence as liberation. Christianity affirms the goodness of created physicality and promises not escape from the body but transformation of the body.

Your body will be raised. Count on it. Bank on it. Live in light of it.

Conformed to His Glorious Body

But what will your resurrection body be like? Paul tells us explicitly: it will be "conformed" to Christ's glorious body. Christ's resurrection body is the pattern. The prototype. The model. What He is physically, you will be physically.

Christ's Resurrection Body

So what was Christ's resurrection body like? The Gospels give us specific details:

Physical and tangible. Jesus invited Thomas to touch His wounds (John 20:27). He wasn't a ghost or apparition. He was physical, touchable, material.

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Capable of eating. Jesus ate fish with the disciples (Luke 24:42-43). He didn't need to eat (glorified bodies won't require food), but He could eat. Physical capability remained.

Recognizable yet different. The disciples sometimes recognized Him immediately (John 20:16, 20). Other times, they didn't recognize Him at first (Luke 24:16, 31; John 21:4). He was recognizably Jesus—same person, same identity. But different somehow. Glorified. Transformed.

Bearing marks of suffering. He still had scars from crucifixion (John 20:27). This is profound: glorified bodies bear the marks of suffering transformed into glory. Your wounds, your scars, your places of deepest pain—they won't simply disappear. They'll be transformed into testimony. Into glory. Into evidence of redemption's power.

Not limited by physical barriers. Jesus appeared in locked rooms (John 20:19, 26). He vanished from sight (Luke 24:31). He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9). His body wasn't limited by walls, distance, or gravity the way current bodies are.

Glorious and radiant. Paul saw the risen Christ on the Damascus road—shining brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13). John saw Him in Revelation 1 with eyes like blazing fire, face like the sun shining in its strength. This is Christ in His full glory—the glory your body will be conformed to.

This is what you're going to be like. Not identical to Christ (He's God, you're not). But conformed to Him. Similar. Bearing His likeness. Manifesting His glory in finite, creaturely form.

Like Him Because We See Him

1 John 3:2 promises: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

We will be like Him. Not metaphorically. Not just spiritually. Actually like Him. In character, yes—but also in glorified physicality. Our bodies will be like His body. Our physical form will reflect His physical glory. We'll be recognizably human but unmistakably glorified.

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And notice the mechanism: "because we will see Him just as He is." Seeing Him produces being like Him. Beholding His glory transforms us into His image. This has been true progressively throughout sanctification (2 Corinthians 3:18). It will be true instantaneously at resurrection. One sight of Christ in His full glory will complete the transformation. Your body will be instantly, completely, permanently conformed to the pattern of His glorious body.

The Transformation Process

But how does God transform a dead, decayed, corrupted body into a glorified, imperishable body? How does dust become glory?

Scripture doesn't give us the mechanics. It just declares the certainty. Philippians 3:21 says Christ will do this "by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

By His power. The same power that created the universe from nothing. The same power that raised Christ from the dead. The same power that subjected all things to Himself. That power—infinite, creative, resurrection power—will transform your body.

You don't need to understand the process to trust the promise. You don't need to explain the mechanics to believe the certainty. If God can create from nothing, He can resurrect from dust. If God can form a body in the womb, He can reform a body from the grave. If God can raise Christ, He can raise you.

The power is there. The promise is sure. The transformation is certain. Your humble, weak, perishable body will be transformed into conformity with Christ's glorious, powerful, imperishable body.

The First Fruits Guarantee

But how can you be certain this will happen? How do you know resurrection isn't just hopeful speculation? Because Christ has already been raised. His resurrection is the guarantee, the prototype, the firstfruits that guarantees the full harvest is coming.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Christ: The Firstfruits

1 Corinthians 15:20, 23 declares: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep...But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming."

Firstfruits. Agricultural terminology again. In Israel's agricultural system, the firstfruits of harvest were offered to God as a guarantee and celebration of the full harvest to come. The firstfruits proved the harvest was real, the crop was ready, the full reaping was imminent.

Christ is the firstfruits of resurrection. His resurrection is the guarantee that the full harvest—the resurrection of all believers—is certain. His rising proves resurrection is possible, real, and coming for all who belong to Him.

This means:

His resurrection proves ours is possible. Death has been defeated. The grave has been conquered. Resurrection isn't theoretical—it's historical. It happened. In space and time. In a real body. In recent history. If Christ was raised, you will be raised.

His resurrection establishes the pattern. What happened to Him will happen to you. Not identical (He conquered death as our representative; you're beneficiary of His conquest), but analogous. Physical resurrection. Transformed body. Imperishable life. You're following the pattern He blazed.

His resurrection guarantees ours is coming. Firstfruits guarantee full harvest. If the first sheaf is raised, the full harvest follows. Christ's resurrection isn't an isolated miracle. It's the beginning of a process that culminates in the resurrection of all believers. He rose. You will rise. Certainly. Guaranteed by His prior rising.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

United with Christ in Resurrection

But the connection between Christ's resurrection and yours is even deeper than pattern and guarantee. You're united with Christ. Romans 6:5 says: "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection."

United with Him. Not just following Him. United with Him. Your identity is wrapped up in His. Your destiny is connected to His. What happened to Him determines what happens to you.

He died. You died with Him (positionally, at conversion—Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3). He was buried. You were buried with Him (Romans 6:4). He was raised. You were raised with Him (Colossians 3:1—spiritually now; physically at His return).

This union means His resurrection power is already at work in you. Ephesians 1:19-20 speaks of "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead."

The same power that raised Christ is working in you. Now. Already. Producing spiritual resurrection (Ephesians 2:5). And guaranteeing physical resurrection (Romans 8:11): "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

The Spirit who raised Jesus dwells in you. And He will raise you. Guaranteed. Your mortal body will receive life. Not just your soul surviving. Your body being raised. By the same Spirit. With the same power. In the same pattern.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Empty Tomb Testifies

And the evidence for Christ's resurrection—and therefore the guarantee of yours—is overwhelming. The tomb was empty. The disciples, once cowardly, became bold martyrs. The church exploded across the Roman Empire despite fierce persecution. Hundreds saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:6). Lives were transformed. History was altered.

But more than historical evidence, you have experiential evidence. If you're in Christ, you've already experienced resurrection. Not physical yet, but spiritual. You were dead in sin. You've been made alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5). You've experienced the power of resurrection in your soul. The same power will raise your body.

Every spiritual victory is evidence of resurrection power. Every moment when you choose holiness over sin—resurrection power. Every time you love when you'd rather hate—resurrection power. Every instance of choosing God when the world pulls away—resurrection power.

The power that will raise your body is already working in your soul. And if it's powerful enough to resurrect your dead spirit, it's powerful enough to resurrect your dead body.

Christ rose. You will rise. This is certain.

Imperishable, Glorious, Powerful

Now let's look more carefully at the specific qualities Paul describes for resurrection bodies. What exactly will your glorified body be like? What capabilities will it have? What limitations will be removed?

Imperishable: Beyond Death's Reach

"It is raised an imperishable body." Your resurrection body cannot die. Cannot decay. Cannot deteriorate. Cannot be destroyed.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Think about what this means. No more aging. No more wrinkles appearing. No more joints aching. No more muscles weakening. No more organs failing. No more cells dying. Your body will remain in perfect condition forever. Eternal youth. Permanent vitality. Unending health.

No more disease. No cancer. No heart disease. No Alzheimer's. No chronic pain. No genetic disorders. No disabilities. No illness of any kind. Ever. Your body will be completely healthy, completely whole, completely perfect forever.

No more death. No fear of dying. No watching the clock tick down. No terminal diagnoses. No funeral preparations. No cemeteries. Death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54). The last enemy will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). Your body will live forever because death will have no power over it.

This is imperishable. Beyond corruption's reach. Outside death's domain. Removed from decay's grasp. Eternally alive. Permanently vital. Forever healthy.

Glorious: Beauty Restored and Perfected

"It is raised in glory." Your resurrection body will be glorious. Beautiful. Radiant. Reflecting God's glory in creaturely form.

All the ways sin has marred physical beauty—aging, disease, injury, disability—will be reversed. Not just healed. Perfected. Your body will reflect the glory God always intended it to display. Not vain, self-focused beauty. Glory-of-God beauty. Image-of-God beauty. Redeemed-creation beauty.

Remember: you're created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). But that image has been distorted by sin. Marred by the fall. Corrupted by rebellion. Your resurrection body will perfectly reflect God's image. Not just spiritually (though certainly that). Physically. Your glorified body will manifest God's glory in visible, tangible form.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This doesn't mean everyone looks identical. It means everyone perfectly expresses the image of God according to their unique, individual identity. Diversity perfected, not erased. Individuality glorified, not eliminated. You'll be recognizably you—but you reflecting God's glory perfectly, displaying His image flawlessly, manifesting His character visibly.

And like Christ's resurrection body, you'll likely have some form of radiance. Perhaps not blazing like the sun (that's Christ's unique glory as God-man). But reflecting His glory. Shining with His light. Radiating His presence. The righteous will "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43).

Powerful: Limitations Removed

"It is raised in power." Your resurrection body will be powerful. Not limited by current physical constraints. Not weak. Not fragile. Not easily exhausted.

Think about your current limitations. You can't run indefinitely—you get tired. You can't lift beyond a certain weight—your strength has limits. You can't focus infinitely—your mind gets exhausted. You can't work endlessly—you need sleep. Your body constrains what you can do.

But your resurrection body will be powerful. Free from these limitations. Not omnipotent (that's God alone). But capable of whatever glorified humans are meant to do in the new creation. Tireless service. Endless worship. Unlimited exploration. Joyful activity without exhaustion.

Perhaps this includes abilities beyond current imagination. Christ's resurrection body could move through locked doors, appear and disappear, ascend to heaven. Not violating physics—transcending it. Operating according to new creation's laws, not old creation's limitations.

Your resurrection body might have capabilities you can't currently conceive. Not superhero powers for self-glory. Glorified capacities for serving God and enjoying His creation forever. Whatever God intends redeemed humanity to do and be, your resurrection body will be perfectly equipped to accomplish.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Spiritual: Fully Responsive to God

"It is raised a spiritual body." Not non-physical. Not immaterial. Spiritual in the sense of being fully animated by the Spirit, fully responsive to God, fully suited for spiritual realities.

Your current body is "natural"—driven by natural appetites, subject to natural laws, animated by natural life. It rebels against your sanctified desires. It craves what it shouldn't. It resists what it should. It wars against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17).

But your resurrection body will be "spiritual"—perfectly aligned with the Spirit, completely responsive to God's will, entirely suited for eternal life in God's presence. No more internal conflict. No more flesh warring against Spirit. No more body pulling toward sin.

This means perfect obedience will be natural, not forced. Worshiping will be effortless, not difficult. Loving will be spontaneous, not demanding. Serving will be joyful, not burdensome. Your body will finally, fully, completely cooperate with your redeemed spirit in doing what pleases God.

And it means perfect enjoyment of God's presence. Current bodies can't handle unmediated divine glory—it would destroy us. But glorified bodies, being "spiritual," will be suited for God's presence. Capable of enduring glory. Equipped for face-to-face encounter. Prepared for eternal communion without being consumed.

The Body Is for the Lord

1 Corinthians 6:13-14 declares: "The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power."

The body is for the Lord. Not just your soul. Your body. Created for Him. Redeemed by Him. Destined for resurrection by Him. And notice: "the Lord is for the body." He's not against physicality. He's for it. He created it. He values it. He will resurrect it.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This has massive implications for how you treat your body now. If it's going to be raised, it matters. If it's destined for glory, it deserves care. If it's for the Lord, it shouldn't be used for sin.

Don't abuse your body—it's going to be raised. Don't neglect your body—it's for the Lord. Don't worship your body—it's not ultimate. But don't despise your body—it's going to be glorified.

Living in Light of Resurrection

So how do you live now in light of guaranteed resurrection? How does this hope shape current choices?

First, care for your body wisely. It's going to be raised. Treat it accordingly. Not obsessively (body worship is idolatry). But responsibly. Proper nutrition, exercise, rest. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). It's destined for resurrection. Care for it.

Second, use your body for God's glory now. Romans 12:1 urges: "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God." Your body isn't just for you. It's for the Lord. Use it to serve Him. To worship Him. To love others. To advance His kingdom.

Third, resist sexual immorality. Your body is for the Lord, not for sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:13). Sexual sin is particularly serious because it sins against your own body—the body destined for resurrection and glory. What you do with your body now matters eternally.

Fourth, don't let physical limitations define you. Yes, your current body has limitations. Weakness. Disability. Disease. Aging. But this isn't your permanent state. Resurrection is coming. Your body will be glorified. Let this hope sustain you through current physical struggles.

Fifth, face death with hope. Death isn't the end. The grave isn't your final home. Your body will be raised. Death is real, painful, an enemy—but a defeated enemy. Christ has conquered death. Your resurrection is certain. Face death with sorrow, yes (loss is real), but also with hope (resurrection is coming).

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Sixth, long for Christ's return. Paul says we "eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Eagerly. Actively. Hopefully. Because when He returns, transformation happens. Bodies are raised. Glory is revealed. Resurrection occurs. Long for that day.

Seventh, let resurrection hope fuel perseverance. 1 Corinthians 15:58 concludes the resurrection chapter: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Because resurrection is certain, your labor matters. Nothing you do in the body for Christ is wasted. It all counts for eternity.

Eighth, practice resurrection now. You've been raised with Christ spiritually (Colossians 3:1). Live like it. "Seek the things above, where Christ is." Let resurrection power work in you now. Choose life over death. Light over darkness. Righteousness over sin. Every choice for holiness is practicing resurrection.

Ninth, remember continuity and discontinuity. Your resurrection body will be you—continuous with your current body. But glorified—discontinuous in its capabilities. This means who you are now matters. What you do in your body now shapes who you'll be in your resurrection body. Not earning resurrection (that's grace). But your faithfulness now affects your eternity then.

Tenth, worship the One who makes it possible. None of this is your achievement. It's all Christ's accomplishment. He died and rose to make your resurrection possible. He conquered death to guarantee yours. Worship Him. Thank Him. Adore Him for the hope of resurrection He's secured for you.

Your body will be raised. Not metaphorically. Not spiritually only. Actually, physically, gloriously raised. The same body that's reading these words will one day be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual. The same flesh that experiences weakness now will experience strength then. The same physical form that dies will live forever.

This is the resurrection hope. Not escape from physicality. Transformation of physicality. Not abandoning the body. Glorifying the body. Not leaving creation behind. Renewing creation completely.

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And it's certain. Guaranteed by Christ's own resurrection. Promised by God's own Word. Secured by the Spirit's own indwelling.

One day—certain day, coming day, glorious day—the trumpet will sound. The dead in Christ will rise. Those alive will be transformed. And every believer will receive a glorified body conformed to Christ's glorious body.

Imperishable. Glorious. Powerful. Spiritual. Perfect. Eternal.

This is your destiny. This is your hope. This is your guaranteed future.

Your body will be raised. And it will be glorious.

"For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality." — **1 Corinthians 15:52-53**
(NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 18

Eternal Weight of Glory—Beyond Comparison

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." — 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NASB)

Paul gives us a math problem that can't be solved.

Try to compare these two quantities: momentary, light affliction versus eternal weight of glory. Try to put them on a scale and see which is heavier. Try to measure them against each other and determine proportion.

You can't. It's mathematically impossible. Not because the calculation is difficult. Because there's no comparison. The two quantities exist in different categories entirely. Like trying to compare the weight of a feather to the weight of the sun. Like trying to measure a raindrop against the ocean. Like trying to weigh a second against eternity.

This is Paul's point. The glory coming—the eternal weight of glory being produced through your present suffering—is so far beyond your current affliction that comparison breaks down. The categories are too different. The magnitudes too disparate. The proportions too extreme.

And yet, your mind naturally tries to make the comparison. When suffering is intense, it feels unbearably heavy. When trials drag on, they feel endlessly long. When pain is acute, it seems insurmountably great. In those moments, glory feels abstract, distant, perhaps even questionable. The suffering is immediate, tangible, crushing. The glory is future, invisible, theoretical.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is why Paul has to remind us: we do not lose heart. Even though our outer man is decaying—even though the body ages, weakens, breaks down—we don't lose heart. Why? Because something is being produced. Something is being created. Something is emerging from this present affliction that makes it all worthwhile.

An eternal weight of glory. Far beyond all comparison. Being produced right now through your momentary, light affliction.

This is the ultimate truth we've been building toward through eighteen chapters. Everything we've discussed—transformation from glory to glory, sanctification through trials, preparation through suffering, the revealing of sons, the beatific vision, glorified bodies—all of it culminates here. In this promise. This certainty. This incomparable, inconceivable, eternal weight of glory.

This isn't just consolation for suffering. This isn't just motivation to persevere. This is the ultimate reality toward which all of history is moving, all of creation is groaning, all of God's purposes are directed. The revealing of glory so magnificent, so weighty, so eternal that everything else—every trial, every pain, every tear, every loss—will be shown to be what Paul calls it: momentary and light by comparison.

You can't comprehend this glory now. You can't imagine it fully. You can't grasp its magnitude. But you can know it's coming. You can trust it's certain. You can live in light of it even while you can't yet see it.

This is faith. This is hope. This is the eternal perspective that sustains through present affliction and produces joy even in suffering.

The Contrast of Weights

Let's start by examining Paul's contrasts carefully. He's not minimizing suffering. He's contextualizing it within eternal reality. He's not saying affliction doesn't hurt. He's saying glory will outweigh it so completely that in retrospect, the affliction will appear momentary and light.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Momentary vs. Eternal

"Momentary affliction...eternal weight of glory."

Momentary. The Greek word (*parautika*) means "for the present moment," "right now," "temporary." Your suffering, however long it lasts in clock time, is momentary compared to eternity. Ten years of trial? Momentary against endless ages. A lifetime of pain? A blip on eternity's timeline. Decades of difficulty? A vapor compared to forever.

This isn't minimizing real suffering. Paul knew suffering—beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, persecuted. He's not speaking theoretically about trials he's never experienced. He's speaking from the midst of authentic affliction. And from that place, he declares: it's momentary.

Because eternal isn't just "a really long time." Eternal is forever. Without end. Perpetual. Unceasing. Never ending. Always continuing. The glory you'll experience has no expiration date. No conclusion. No termination point. It goes on and on and on, world without end, age after age after age.

Set your longest suffering against endless eternity. It's momentary. It's a millisecond. It's nothing. Not because it isn't real or doesn't hurt, but because it's temporary and glory is eternal.

Light vs. Weighty

"Light affliction...weight of glory."

Light. The Greek word (*elaphros*) means easy to bear, not heavy, not burdensome. This is the part that feels wrong when you're in deep suffering. There's nothing light about cancer. Nothing easy about chronic pain. Nothing unburdening about persecution, loss, or grief.

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But Paul adds a crucial qualifier: "far beyond all comparison" (*kath' hyperbolēn eis hyperbolēn*). This phrase literally means "beyond excess to excess" or "exceedingly exceeding." It's Paul stacking superlatives because language fails to capture the magnitude. The glory is so heavy, so weighty, so substantial that by comparison, the affliction—however crushing it feels now—is light.

Weight of glory. *Baros* means weight, burden, heaviness, substance. Glory has weight. Glory has substance. Glory has heft. It's not airy or ethereal or insubstantial. It's solid. Real. Weighty. Heavy in the best sense—substantial, significant, momentous.

And notice: it's not just glory. It's *weight* of glory. Glory compounded. Glory intensified. Glory made even more glorious by its weightiness. This is glory that has substance, that presses down with significance, that matters eternally.

Think of it this way: suffering feels heavy now because it's immediate and temporal realities carry immediate weight. But when eternal realities are revealed, when glory is manifested, when what's been hidden becomes visible—the proportions will reverse. What seemed heavy will be shown to be light. What seemed overwhelming will be demonstrated to be manageable. What seemed unbearable will be revealed to be, in fact, momentary and light when set against eternal weight of glory.

Beyond All Comparison

But here's where Paul's language really explodes: "far beyond all comparison."

Beyond comparison. Not just "greater than." Not just "more than." Beyond comparison. In a different category. Operating on a different scale. Existing in a different dimension. Like comparing a grain of sand to a galaxy. Like weighing a whisper against a thunderclap. Like measuring a candle against the sun.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

You can't compare them because the categories are too different. The magnitudes too disparate. One is finite, the other infinite. One is temporal, the other eternal. One is seen, the other unseen. One is experienced through suffering, the other received as gift. One belongs to this age, the other to the age to come.

This is why attempts to calculate whether "it's worth it" always fail. You're trying to compare incomparables. You're trying to weigh the unweighable. You're trying to measure the immeasurable. The glory exceeds all comparison so completely that the math doesn't work. There's no equation. No formula. No calculation that captures the proportion.

The Mathematical Impossibility

Let me try to illustrate the impossibility of this comparison, though every illustration falls infinitely short:

If your lifetime of suffering—let's say 80 years of continuous trial—was represented by a single second, how much time would eternal glory be? Not 80 years. Not 8,000 years. Not 8 million years. Infinite years. Forever. No end. Always more. The single second of suffering against endless ages of glory.

Or try this: if your greatest suffering could be represented by a single drop of water, how much water would eternal glory be? Not a cup. Not a lake. Not an ocean. Infinite oceans. Endless seas. Perpetual waters flowing forever. The single drop against infinite oceans.

Or this: if all your accumulated pain, loss, grief, trial—everything you've suffered and ever will suffer—could be represented by a single grain of sand, how many grains would eternal glory be? Not a beach. Not a desert. Not all the beaches and deserts on earth. Every particle in the universe, multiplied infinitely, continuing forever.

Every illustration fails. Every comparison breaks down. Because you can't compare finite to infinite. You can't weigh temporary against eternal. You can't measure momentary against everlasting.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is Paul's point. The glory is so far beyond the suffering that comparison is meaningless. It's not 10 times greater. Not 1,000 times. Not 1,000,000 times. Infinitely greater. Eternally weightier. Beyond all comparison.

And this glory—this inconceivable, incomprehensible, infinite glory—is what's being produced through your present affliction.

The Production Process

But notice Paul doesn't just say the glory will compensate for suffering. He says suffering is *producing* glory. Present tense. Active verb. Right now. This very moment. Your affliction is accomplishing something. Creating something. Generating something.

Producing, Not Just Preceding

"Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory."

Producing. The Greek word (*katergazoma*) means to work out, to accomplish, to bring about, to produce through labor. This is active causation. Your suffering isn't just something you endure until glory arrives. Your suffering is the means by which glory is being produced.

This is mysterious. How does present affliction produce future glory? How does temporal trial create eternal weight? How does suffering work out glory?

Scripture doesn't fully explain the mechanics. But it declares the certainty. Romans 8:17 confirms: "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

Notice the logical connection: "if indeed we suffer with Him *so that* we may also be glorified with Him." Suffering with Christ is the pathway to being glorified with Christ. Not just chronologically (suffering now, glory later), but causally (suffering now produces glory then).

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

How Suffering Produces Glory

But how? How does this work? Scripture gives us hints:

Suffering conforms you to Christ. Philippians 3:10 speaks of "the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Suffering shapes you into Christ's image. And conformity to Christ is the essence of glory—being like Him, reflecting Him, manifesting Him. The suffering that makes you more like Christ is producing the glory of being like Christ.

Suffering refines character. Romans 5:3-5 traces the progression: "tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope." The character produced through trial is eternal character. Proven, refined, purified character that will shine in glory. What's being formed in you through suffering now is who you'll be in glory then.

Suffering trains for reigning. 2 Timothy 2:12 promises: "If we endure, we will also reign with Him." Endurance through suffering is training for future reign. The faithfulness you demonstrate now qualifies you for responsibility then. What you're learning through trial now equips you for glory then.

Suffering increases capacity for glory. Like a vessel being enlarged through stretching, suffering expands your capacity to contain and manifest glory. The deeper the suffering, the greater the capacity for glory. The more intense the refining, the purer the gold. The hotter the fire, the more complete the transformation.

Suffering deepens intimacy with Christ. You know Christ in suffering in ways you can't know Him in ease. Philippians 3:10 links knowing Christ with sharing His sufferings. This intimate knowledge of Christ through suffering is eternal knowledge. It's knowing Him in a way that will enrich your experience of Him forever.

Suffering produces testimony. Revelation 12:11 says they overcame "because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." Your testimony—your faithfulness through trial, your perseverance through suffering, your triumph through difficulty—becomes eternal testimony. It glorifies God forever. It displays His power permanently. It witnesses to His grace eternally.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

All of this and more is being produced through your affliction. It's not random. It's not meaningless. It's not wasted. Every tear is producing something. Every trial is accomplishing something. Every difficulty is creating something.

An eternal weight of glory. Being produced. Right now. Through this.

The Assurance of Production

But how can you be confident this is actually happening? How do you know suffering is producing glory rather than just producing more suffering?

Because God promises it. "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). All things. Including suffering. Including trials. Including affliction. God is working it together for good—not making all things good in themselves, but working them together toward a good result.

And what's that good? The next verse tells us: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). The good is conformity to Christ. And conformity to Christ is glory. So God is working all things—including your suffering—toward your glorification.

You may not see it. You may not feel it. You may not understand it. But it's happening. God is working. Glory is being produced. The weight is accumulating. The treasure is being stored. The crown is being fashioned.

Trust the promise. Believe the process. Know that nothing is wasted. Every moment of faithfulness through affliction is producing eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Unseen Reality

But here's the problem: you can't see this glory being produced. You can't measure it accumulating. You can't verify it happening. Which brings us to Paul's critical instruction: "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

Faith: The Conviction of Things Not Seen

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Conviction of things not seen. Not hope that they might exist. Not wishful thinking. Conviction. Certainty. Assurance. About things you can't see. About realities that aren't visible. About promises not yet fulfilled.

This is what sustains you through affliction: faith that sees what sight cannot see. Faith that knows what experience hasn't yet verified. Faith that believes what circumstances seem to contradict.

You can see the affliction. It's obvious. Immediate. Tangible. Undeniable. You feel it. You experience it. You live with it daily. The suffering is seen.

But the glory being produced? Unseen. Not yet manifested. Not yet revealed. Not yet experienced. You can't see it accumulating. You can't measure it growing. You can't verify it happening.

This is why faith is necessary. If you could see the glory, you wouldn't need faith. If you could measure its production, you wouldn't need trust. If you could verify it empirically, you wouldn't need conviction.

But you can't. So you must believe. You must trust. You must maintain conviction about things not yet seen.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Seen vs. Unseen Tension

Paul makes the contrast explicit: "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Seen = Temporal. Visible things are temporary. Physical realities are passing away. What you can measure with your senses belongs to this age, which is fading.

Unseen = Eternal. Invisible realities are permanent. Spiritual truths are everlasting. What faith perceives is what lasts forever.

This creates profound tension in Christian living. Everything your senses tell you contradicts what faith knows. Sight says affliction is heavy and glory is questionable. Faith says affliction is light and glory is certain. Sight says suffering is real and glory is abstract. Faith says glory is real and suffering is temporary.

Sight focuses on what's immediate. Faith focuses on what's ultimate. Sight measures by present experience. Faith measures by eternal reality. Sight weights toward the visible. Faith weights toward the invisible.

And you must choose: Which will you trust? Which will you believe? Which will you live by?

2 Corinthians 5:7 states your calling: "for we walk by faith, not by sight." Not by what you can see. Not by what you can measure. Not by what your senses verify. By faith. By trust in what God has promised even when you can't yet see it.

The Building Not Made with Hands

But faith isn't believing in nothing. Faith is believing in something real that isn't yet visible. 2 Corinthians 5:1 describes this reality: "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

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We *know*. Not hope. Not speculate. Know. How? By faith. By God's promise. By the Spirit's witness.

And what do we know? That when this temporary body (earthly tent) dies, we have a permanent body (building from God). Not made with hands—not human construction, but divine creation. Eternal in the heavens—permanent, everlasting, secured in God's presence.

This is what faith sees: the reality that's more real than what's currently visible. The house not made with hands that's more substantial than the tent we currently inhabit. The eternal that's more certain than the temporal.

Your earthly tent is decaying. That's visible. Obvious. Undeniable. You feel your body aging, weakening, breaking down. That's the seen reality. Temporal. Passing away.

But you have a building from God. That's invisible. Not yet manifested. Not yet experienced. But certain. Promised. Guaranteed. That's the unseen reality. Eternal. Permanent.

Faith chooses to focus on the unseen rather than the seen. Not ignoring the seen—acknowledging it honestly. But not being controlled by it. Not letting it determine perspective. Not allowing it to shape hope.

Looking at the Unseen

But how do you look at what's unseen? How do you focus on what's invisible? How do you fix your eyes on what faith perceives rather than what sight sees?

Through Scripture. God's Word reveals unseen realities. It describes the glory that's coming. It promises the inheritance that's waiting. It declares the certainty of what's hoped for. As you saturate your mind in Scripture, you're training your spiritual eyes to see what physical eyes cannot.

Through worship. In worship, you turn your attention from earthly realities to heavenly realities. From temporal circumstances to eternal truth. From what you can see to who you can't yet see but know is there. Worship reorients perspective toward the unseen.

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Through prayer. Prayer is communion with the Invisible God. It's conversation with the One you can't see but know is there. Every prayer is practice in focusing on the unseen rather than the seen.

Through community. When you gather with other believers, you're reminded you're not alone in trusting unseen realities. Others are walking by faith too. Their testimony encourages yours. Their perseverance strengthens yours. Their hope fuels yours.

Through remembering. Regularly rehearse God's faithfulness in the past. Remember how He's kept His promises. Recall how He's sustained you through previous trials. Past faithfulness builds confidence in future promises.

Through anticipation. Deliberately imagine—as best you can—the glory that's coming. Not fantasizing or creating false expectations, but meditating on what Scripture describes. Let your mind dwell on promises of resurrection, restoration, reunion, redemption completed.

Through contrast. When present suffering feels overwhelming, consciously contrast it with eternal glory. "This suffering is momentary and light. That glory is eternal and weighty. This is seen and temporal. That is unseen and eternal." Speak truth to counter what sight suggests.

This is how you look at the unseen. And as you do—as you consciously, deliberately, repeatedly fix your attention on unseen eternal realities rather than seen temporal circumstances—something happens. Perspective shifts. Hope strengthens. Endurance increases. And you find you can face affliction without losing heart.

Eternal Perspective

Now we come to the practical application: living with eternal perspective. Not just knowing about eternal realities, but letting them shape how you live now, what you pursue now, where you invest now.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This World Is Not Your Home

C.S. Lewis wrote: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next."

This is counterintuitive but profoundly true. Those who are most heavenly minded are most earthly good. Those who think most about eternity are most effective in time. Those who focus most on unseen realities accomplish most in seen realities.

Why? Because eternal perspective liberates you from temporal entanglement. When you know this world isn't your home, you hold earthly things loosely. When you're confident of eternal weight of glory, you're free from desperate grasping after temporal glory. When you're sure of imperishable treasure, you're generous with perishable possessions.

Eternal perspective doesn't make you useless in this world. It makes you useful in the right ways. Not chasing after what doesn't last. Not investing in what can't be kept. Not building on foundations that crumble. But pursuing what matters eternally. Investing in what lasts forever. Building on the only foundation that endures.

What Lasts Forever?

So what actually lasts? What survives the transition from this age to the age to come? What makes it through the fire that consumes wood, hay, and straw (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)?

People last. Souls are eternal. Every person you encounter will exist forever—either with God or separated from Him. This means people matter more than things. Relationships matter more than achievements. Souls matter more than success.

Eternal perspective means you invest in people. You prioritize relationships. You care about souls. You love others—not because they benefit you, but because they're eternal beings made in God's image.

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God's Word lasts. Isaiah 40:8 promises: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." Governments rise and fall. Empires come and go. Philosophies flourish and fade. But God's Word endures eternally.

Eternal perspective means you saturate yourself in Scripture. You build your life on its truth. You align your values with its priorities. You trust its promises. Because when everything else passes away, God's Word remains.

Faith, hope, love last. 1 Corinthians 13:13 declares: "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." These survive the transition to glory. They last eternally. They matter forever.

Eternal perspective means you cultivate faith—trusting God when you can't see. You maintain hope—confident in promises not yet fulfilled. You practice love—sacrificial, selfless, others-focused love that reflects God's character.

What you do in the body for Christ lasts. 1 Corinthians 15:58 concludes the resurrection chapter: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Your labor for Christ isn't wasted. It matters eternally. It produces eternal fruit.

Eternal perspective means you work heartily for Christ. You serve faithfully. You use your gifts. You pursue your calling. Not for earthly recognition, but for eternal reward. Not for temporal success, but for eternal fruitfulness.

Character developed through trials lasts. The perseverance, proven character, hope produced through tribulation (Romans 5:3-5)—this is eternal character. It's who you're becoming, and that person will live forever.

Eternal perspective means you welcome character-forming trials. Not masochistically, but purposefully. Knowing they're producing eternal qualities. Shaping eternal identity. Creating eternal capacity for glory.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

How Eternal Perspective Changes Present Living

When you truly believe in eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, it changes everything:

You hold possessions loosely. You can't take them with you. They're temporary. They don't last. So you're generous. Open-handed. Free from materialistic bondage. Using resources for eternal purposes rather than accumulating treasures that moths and rust destroy (Matthew 6:19-20).

You endure suffering hopefully. It's producing something. Creating something. Accomplishing something. An eternal weight of glory that will make the suffering seem momentary and light by comparison. So you don't lose heart. You persevere. You keep going.

You invest in the eternal rather than the temporal. You prioritize what lasts. You pursue what matters forever. You build on foundations that endure. Not ignoring temporal responsibilities, but not making them ultimate either.

You live for an audience of One. You're not obsessed with earthly approval, earthly success, earthly recognition. You live for God's approval. You pursue His "well done." You seek His glory, not your own.

You make decisions differently. Every choice is evaluated through eternal lens: How does this affect my relationship with God? How does this impact my character? How does this influence others eternally? How does this align with God's purposes?

You face death differently. Death isn't the end. It's transition. From temporary tent to permanent building. From momentary affliction to eternal glory. From faith to sight. From partial knowledge to full knowledge. You still grieve losses (that's right and human), but "not as those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

You evangelize urgently. People matter eternally. Their destiny matters forever. Their decision about Christ determines their eternity. So you share the gospel. You pray for the lost. You invest in reaching those who don't know Christ.

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You worship more freely. When you're gripped by the reality of eternal weight of glory, worship becomes natural. Spontaneous. Joyful. You're not just going through religious motions. You're responding to incredible reality. Celebrating certain hope. Anticipating guaranteed glory.

The Daily Practice of Eternal Perspective

But how do you maintain eternal perspective daily when temporal realities press in constantly? How do you keep your eyes on the unseen when the seen demands immediate attention?

Start each day remembering. Before your feet hit the floor, remind yourself: "This is not my permanent home. I'm a citizen of heaven. Eternal weight of glory is being produced. This day matters for eternity."

Filter decisions through eternity. Before making choices, ask: "How does this look from eternity's perspective? Will this matter in 10,000 years? Is this building on eternal foundation or temporal sand?"

Practice gratitude for eternal gifts. Thank God for salvation. For eternal life. For promised glory. For resurrection hope. For the Spirit's presence. Gratitude for eternal realities keeps them in focus.

Memorize Scripture about glory. Hide promises of eternal weight in your heart. Romans 8:18. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. 1 Peter 5:10. Philippians 3:20-21. When suffering presses, speak these truths.

Cultivate dissatisfaction with temporal. Don't let earthly pleasures fully satisfy. Let them point beyond themselves. Let every good gift remind you of the Giver. Let every earthly joy increase hunger for heavenly joy.

Regularly contemplate heaven. Set aside time to meditate on what's coming. Read Revelation 21-22. Imagine the new heavens and new earth. Think about resurrection body, face-to-face encounter, eternal worship, perfect relationships.

Share eternal perspective with others. Talk about heaven. Discuss glory. Remind each other of eternal realities. When everyone around you focuses on temporal, be the voice pointing toward eternal.

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Measure success eternally. Stop evaluating life by earthly standards—wealth, position, achievement, recognition. Evaluate by eternal standards—faithfulness, character, love, service, fruit that lasts.

Let trials redirect focus. When suffering comes, use it to reorient perspective. "This affliction is producing eternal glory. This trial is temporary. This pain is working something eternal."

Watch for glory breaking through. Even now, in the already-but-not-yet, glory sometimes breaks through. Moments of transcendent worship. Times of palpable peace. Instances of unmistakable provision. Notice them. They're previews of coming glory.

The eternal weight of glory is real. More real than your current circumstances. More certain than your present suffering. More substantial than anything visible.

It's being produced. Right now. Through your affliction. By God's power. For His glory and your good.

It's beyond comparison. Incomparable to anything you've experienced or can imagine. Greater than your highest hopes. Exceeding your wildest dreams.

It's unseen but certain. Invisible but real. Not yet manifested but absolutely guaranteed. Promised by God who cannot lie. Secured by Christ who rose from death. Witnessed by the Spirit who dwells in you.

And one day—certain day, coming day, glorious day—it will be revealed. The unseen will become seen. The invisible will become visible. The promised will become experienced. The hoped-for will become realized.

And in that moment, when eternal weight of glory is fully manifested, when you see Christ face to face, when you receive your resurrection body, when you're revealed with Him in glory—in that moment, you'll understand.

You'll see that the affliction truly was momentary and light. You'll realize the glory truly is eternal and weighty. You'll comprehend that the comparison truly is impossible because the categories are too different, the magnitudes too disparate, the proportions too extreme.

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And you'll say with complete honesty, complete joy, complete satisfaction: "It was worth it. Every tear. Every trial. Every pain. Every loss. Worth it. Because this—*this*—this eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison—this is what was being produced all along."

Until that day, don't lose heart. Though the outer man is decaying, the inner man is being renewed. Though the tent is collapsing, the building is being prepared. Though the seen is temporal, the unseen is eternal.

Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. Walk by faith, not by sight. Trust the promise. Believe the process. Know that affliction is producing glory.

An eternal weight of glory. Far beyond all comparison. Coming soon.

And it will be worth it.

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."— 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

CONCLUSION

Living in the Meantime—Until Glory Comes

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."— Titus 2:11-13 (NASB)

We've come a long way together through these pages.

We've explored God's preparation process—how He's shaping you from glory to glory, transforming you into Christ's image, preparing you for the ultimate revelation of glory that's coming. We've examined the foundation of your identity as His workmanship, the incomprehensible preparation He's made for you, and the power of the gospel that operates from faith to faith.

We've walked through the transformation process—unveiling faces before the mirror of God's glory, enduring the refiner's fire, dying daily with Christ so His life can be manifested through you. We've considered the manifestation of glory in earthen vessels, as children of light, as living epistles, and as ambassadors representing the kingdom.

We've practiced the daily disciplines—abiding in Christ as the vine, being transformed through the Word, sharpening one another in community, and suffering for glory with hope. And we've looked ahead to the ultimate consummation—the revealing of the sons of God, the beatific vision of seeing God face to face, the resurrection of glorified bodies, and the eternal weight of glory that makes all present affliction appear momentary and light by comparison.

But now comes the critical question: What do you do in the meantime? How do you live between the "already" and the "not yet"? How do you navigate the tension between glory begun and glory consummated? How do you walk faithfully in the present age while watching for the blessed hope?

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is where theology becomes biography. Where doctrine becomes discipleship. Where truth becomes life. Because you live in the meantime. In the gap between Christ's first appearing and His second appearing. Between grace that has saved you and glory that will complete you. Between transformation begun and transformation finished.

You live in the already-but-not-yet. Already saved but not yet glorified. Already children of God but not yet revealed as such. Already possessing the Spirit but not yet possessing resurrection bodies. Already citizens of heaven but not yet residing there. Already transformed but not yet perfected.

And the question is: How do you live faithfully, purposefully, hopefully in this in-between time?

Paul gives us the framework in Titus 2:11-13. The grace of God has appeared—past tense, accomplished fact, Christ's first coming. That grace instructs us how to live now—present tense, current reality, daily practice. And we're looking for the blessed hope—future tense, certain promise, Christ's second coming.

Past grace. Present living. Future hope. All three connected. All three essential. All three shaping how you navigate the meantime.

Already but Not Yet: Living Between Two Glories

The Christian life exists in profound tension. Not contradiction, but tension. The pull between what is and what will be. The gap between what you've received and what you're awaiting. The distance between glory begun and glory completed.

What's Already True

Let's be clear about what's already accomplished, already certain, already yours in Christ:

You are saved. Not becoming saved. Not hoping to be saved. You are saved. Past tense. Accomplished reality. Ephesians 2:8 declares: "For by grace you have been saved through faith." The work is done. The salvation is secured. The redemption is accomplished.

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You are a child of God. Not trying to become one. Not earning the status. You are one. Present reality. 1 John 3:2 states: "Beloved, now we are children of God." Right now. This moment. You belong to Him. You're in His family. You bear His name.

You are in Christ. United with Him. Identified with Him. Hidden with Him in God (Colossians 3:3). This union is unbreakable. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

You have the Holy Spirit. Right now. Indwelling you. Sealing you. Guaranteeing your inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives in you (Romans 8:11).

You are being transformed. Progressive sanctification is happening. From glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). Day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). The work God began in you, He will complete (Philippians 1:6).

You possess eternal life. Not will possess. Possess. Present tense. John 5:24 promises: "he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." You've already passed from death to life. You already have eternal life.

All of this is already. Accomplished. Certain. Secured. Yours in Christ.

What's Not Yet Revealed

But there's also a "not yet." Realities that are certain but not yet experienced. Promises that are guaranteed but not yet fulfilled. Truths that are secure but not yet manifested.

You're not yet glorified. Romans 8:30 puts glorification in past tense: "these He also glorified"—certain from God's perspective. But from your perspective, it's future. You're being prepared for glory, but you haven't yet experienced full glorification.

You're not yet revealed. Your true identity is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3-4). When He's revealed, you'll be revealed with Him. But that revelation hasn't happened yet. The world doesn't see who you truly are. Even you don't fully see it yet.

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You're not yet perfected. Philippians 3:12 admits: "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Perfection is coming, but it's not here yet.

You're not yet resurrected. If you die before Christ returns, you'll be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8) —which is far better (Philippians 1:23). But you're awaiting resurrection. You're waiting for the redemption of your body (Romans 8:23). The glorified body is promised but not yet received.

You haven't yet seen Him face to face. You know Him truly. You love Him genuinely. But you see dimly, not clearly. You know in part, not fully (1 Corinthians 13:12). The beatific vision is certain but future.

You're not yet home. Your citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). But you're still living on earth. You're aliens and strangers here (1 Peter 2:11). You're waiting for the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

All of this is not yet. Future. Coming. Certain but not yet experienced.

The Tension Is Intentional

This isn't divine forgetfulness. God hasn't overlooked the gap. The tension between already and not yet is intentional. Purposeful. Part of God's design.

The "already" keeps you from despair. You're not still lost. Not still dead in sin. Not still condemned. Not still without hope. Christ has come. Grace has appeared. Salvation has been accomplished. You have been saved. This prevents hopelessness. It grounds confidence. It provides assurance.

The "not yet" keeps you from complacency. You're not fully arrived. Not completely perfected. Not yet glorified. Not yet home. There's more coming. Greater glory awaiting. Complete redemption ahead. This prevents settling. It fuels longing. It creates hunger for more.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The tension between already and not yet produces several essential qualities:

Hope. Romans 8:24-25 says: "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." Hope requires something not yet possessed. The not-yet creates hope.

Faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith operates in the gap between promise and fulfillment. The already-but-not-yet creates space for faith to operate.

Perseverance. The tension creates endurance. You press on because you're not yet arrived. You keep going because the best is yet to come. You persevere because greater glory awaits.

Longing. The ache you feel—the sense that even the best earthly experiences leave you wanting more—that's the not-yet creating holy dissatisfaction. That's the longing for home. For completion. For the day when already and not-yet converge in full experience of all that's been promised.

Gratitude. You're grateful for what you have—salvation, sonship, the Spirit, transformation. And you're eager for what's coming—glorification, revelation, resurrection, face-to-face encounter. Both already and not-yet produce thanksgiving.

Living in the Tension

So how do you live faithfully in this tension?

Celebrate what's already yours. Don't minimize present realities. You are saved. You are God's child. You do have the Spirit. You are being transformed. Rejoice in these realities. Thank God for them. Live from them.

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Anticipate what's not yet here. Don't settle for present experience as if it's all there is. Greater glory is coming. Complete redemption awaits. Perfect bodies are promised. Face-to-face encounter is certain. Long for these. Watch for them. Eagerly expect them.

Don't confuse the two. Don't try to grasp the not-yet now—that produces frustration and false expectations. And don't downplay the already by focusing only on future—that produces ingratitude and joylessness. Hold both in proper tension.

Let the already fuel faithfulness now. Because you've been saved, live like it. Because you're God's child, act like it. Because the Spirit dwells in you, walk in step with Him. Let what's already true shape how you live today.

Let the not-yet create urgency. Because Christ is coming, be ready. Because time is short, invest wisely. Because glory is certain, endure hopefully. Let what's coming motivate how you live now.

Maintain the tension without resolving it prematurely. You live between two advents. Between two appearances of God's glory. Between grace appeared and glory appearing. Don't collapse the tension by either presuming to possess now what's actually future, or by despising as insufficient what God has graciously given now.

This is the Christian life. Already but not yet. Saved but being saved. Justified and being sanctified. Resurrected spiritually and awaiting physical resurrection. Citizens of heaven living on earth. Possessing glory and awaiting greater glory.

Live in the tension. It's where God has placed you. And it's the perfect place to learn faith, cultivate hope, practice perseverance, and develop holy longing for the day when the tension resolves in perfect, complete, eternal glory.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Daily Choices Matter: Every Moment Preparing for Eternity

But living in the already-but-not-yet isn't passive waiting. It's active living. Purposeful choosing. Intentional pursuing. Because what you do in the meantime matters. Every moment. Every choice. Every action.

The Grace That Instructs

Look again at Titus 2:11-12: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age."

Grace instructs. It doesn't just save and then leave you to figure out how to live. It teaches. It trains. It shapes. The same grace that saved you instructs you how to live now.

And what does grace teach?

Deny ungodliness and worldly desires. Say no to what contradicts God's character. Refuse what belongs to the old life. Put to death what's incompatible with your identity in Christ. This is negative holiness—turning away from sin.

Live sensibly, righteously, and godly. Say yes to what reflects God's character. Pursue what fits your new identity. Practice what's consistent with your calling. This is positive holiness—turning toward righteousness.

Both are necessary. Putting off and putting on (Ephesians 4:22-24). Dying and rising (Romans 6:11-14). No to sin and yes to God. Denying the flesh and walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

And notice the timing: "in the present age." Not in some idealized future when you're more spiritual. Not when circumstances are perfect. Now. In this present age. In the midst of real life with real struggles in a real fallen world. Grace teaches you to live godly *now*.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Whatever You Do

But it's even more comprehensive than denying sin and pursuing righteousness. 1 Corinthians 10:31 expands the scope: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

All. Everything. Whatever you do. Not just obviously spiritual activities. Everything. Eating. Drinking. Working. Playing. Sleeping. Exercising. Relationships. Hobbies. Recreation. Rest. All of it. Every bit of your life. Every moment. Every choice. Every action.

Do it all to the glory of God. Do it all in a way that honors Him. Do it all with awareness that you're His representative. Do it all as worship. Do it all as preparation for glory.

This means:

How you work matters eternally. Colossians 3:23-24 instructs: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." Your job isn't just earning a paycheck. It's serving Christ. It's practicing faithfulness. It's preparing for eternal responsibilities.

How you treat people matters eternally. Matthew 25:40 records Jesus saying, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." How you love, serve, forgive, encourage, bear with, speak to, care for others—it all matters. People are eternal. How you treat them has eternal significance.

How you use your body matters eternally. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds you: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Your body belongs to God. It's destined for resurrection. What you do with it matters.

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How you handle money matters eternally. Matthew 6:19-21 warns: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Your financial choices reveal heart priorities. They're either building eternal treasure or temporal trash.

How you speak matters eternally. Matthew 12:36-37 states: "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Words aren't throwaway. They're weighty. They matter. They have eternal significance.

How you respond to suffering matters eternally. We've seen this throughout: suffering produces eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Your faithfulness through trials is creating something eternal. Your perseverance through difficulty is accomplishing something that lasts forever.

How you use your gifts matters eternally. 1 Peter 4:10 instructs: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Your gifts aren't for self-advancement. They're for serving others and glorifying God. How you steward them matters eternally.

Nothing is wasted when it's done for God's glory. No act of service too small. No moment of faithfulness too insignificant. No choice too mundane. All of it—absolutely all of it—matters eternally when it's done as unto the Lord, for His glory, in preparation for eternal glory.

Ordinary Days, Eternal Impact

This radically elevates the ordinary. There are no insignificant moments in a life lived for God's glory. There are no throw-away days. There are no mundane choices that don't matter.

Washing dishes for God's glory? Eternal significance. Changing diapers as service to Christ? Building treasure in heaven. Enduring a difficult day at work with patient faithfulness? Producing eternal weight of glory. Showing kindness to a cranky cashier? Ministering to Jesus Himself (Matthew 25:40).

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Every ordinary day becomes extraordinary when lived for eternal purposes. Every mundane moment becomes meaningful when offered as worship. Every routine choice becomes significant when made in light of coming glory.

You're not just killing time until Christ returns. You're not just surviving until glory arrives. You're actively preparing. Constantly training. Continuously being shaped. Every moment contributing to who you'll be in eternity. Every choice forming character that will last forever. Every act of faithfulness building capacity for eternal glory.

Live accordingly. Choose wisely. Invest purposefully. Because every moment matters. Every choice counts. Every action has eternal significance.

Daily choices aren't distractions from preparing for glory. Daily choices *are* preparing for glory. The faithful washing of today's dishes is as much preparation as the profound theological meditation. The patient endurance of today's traffic is as much training as the intense prayer session. The kind word to today's difficult person is as much worship as Sunday's corporate singing.

All of it matters. All of it counts. All of it's preparing you for glory.

So live accordingly.

The Hopeful Wait: Active Anticipation

But there's one more dimension to living in the meantime: watching. Waiting. Anticipating. Not passive resignation but active expectation. Not fatalistic acceptance but hopeful eagerness. Looking for the blessed hope.

Hope for What We Do Not See

Romans 8:25 describes the nature of Christian hope: "But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Hope. Not wishful thinking. Not uncertain possibility. Biblical hope is confident expectation of certain future reality. You hope for what you don't yet see because you know it's coming. You wait eagerly because arrival is certain, only timing unknown.

And notice the combination: perseverance and eager waiting. Not one or the other. Both. Perseverance suggests long-haul faithfulness, steady endurance, sustained commitment. Eager waiting suggests active anticipation, hopeful expectation, watchful readiness.

This is the posture of the meantime: persevering eagerly. Enduring hopefully. Remaining faithful while actively watching. Continuing steadily while constantly ready.

The Blessed Hope

Titus 2:13 calls it "the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

The blessed hope. Not generic optimism. Not vague positivity. Specific, certain hope: the appearing of Christ's glory. His return. His revelation. His second advent. This is what you're watching for. This is what you're waiting for. This is what you're eagerly anticipating.

And it's blessed. Not dreaded. Not feared. Not reluctantly accepted. Blessed. Happy. Joyful. Wonderful. The best thing that could possibly happen. The culmination of all God's purposes. The completion of all His promises. The consummation of all your hopes.

This is what the church has confessed for two millennia: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." The already (died and risen) and the not yet (will come again) held together in constant tension, constant hope, constant expectation.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Maranatha: Come, Lord Jesus

The early church's prayer was simple: "Maranatha"—"O Lord, come" (1 Corinthians 16:22). The last prayer in Scripture echoes it: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

This wasn't escapism. This wasn't giving up on the world. This was deep longing for the world's redemption. For creation's liberation. For God's purposes fully accomplished. For sin defeated finally. For death destroyed completely. For all things made new.

"Come, Lord Jesus" is the cry of faith that believes He's coming. The prayer of hope that expects His arrival. The plea of love that longs for His presence. The confession of dependence that knows you need Him to return to complete what He's begun.

And it shapes how you live in the meantime:

You live with urgency. Because time is short. Because Christ could return at any moment. Because the day is drawing near. This doesn't produce frantic anxiety. It creates purposeful intentionality. You don't waste time on what doesn't matter because you know time is limited and Christ is coming.

You invest in what lasts. Because you know what's temporary and what's eternal. Because you're confident this world is passing away and a new world is coming. Because you're certain Christ is returning to make all things new. So you invest in people, in the Word, in faith, hope, love—things that survive the transition from this age to the age to come.

You hold earthly things loosely. Because you know they're not permanent. Because your treasure is in heaven. Because your citizenship is elsewhere. Because you're waiting for better, lasting possessions (Hebrews 10:34). You can enjoy earthly good gifts without grasping them desperately because you know greater gifts are coming.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

You remain ready. Jesus repeatedly warned: "Be ready" (Matthew 24:44). "Stay awake" (Matthew 25:13). "Be on the alert" (Matthew 24:42). Not constantly looking at the sky. But maintaining spiritual preparedness. Living in a state of readiness. Keeping short accounts with God. Maintaining faithfulness. Practicing holiness. So that whenever He comes—whether at His return or at your death—you're ready.

You watch with hope. Not fearful dread but joyful expectation. Not anxiety about judgment (you're already justified in Christ) but anticipation of glorification. Not worried about His coming but eager for it. Because when He appears, you appear with Him in glory. When He's revealed, you're revealed. When He returns in glory, you're glorified.

Living as Though He's Coming Today While Working as Though He's Not Coming for Years

There's a healthy tension here. Live with the urgency of "He could come today"—be ready, stay faithful, keep accounts short, maintain holiness. But also work with the faithfulness of "He might not come for years"—invest in relationships, plan wisely, steward resources, pursue calling, serve faithfully in the long haul.

Don't quit your job and sit on a mountain waiting. That's irresponsibility, not readiness. But don't live as if you have unlimited time. You don't. Christ is coming. And whether at His return or your death, you will meet Him. Be ready.

This double perspective keeps you balanced. Urgent but not frantic. Ready but not irresponsible. Watching but not idle. Working but not as if this life is all there is. Faithful in the present while fixed on the future.

The blessed hope isn't escape from reality. It's the ultimate reality that gives meaning to current reality. It's not abandoning the world but anticipating its redemption. It's not giving up on creation but expecting its restoration. It's not despairing about the present but living in light of what's certain to come.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

And this hope shapes everything. How you face suffering (it's producing glory). How you handle loss (death is defeated). How you endure trials (they're temporary). How you make choices (eternity is coming). How you live each day (Christ could return).

Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus. This is the prayer of the meantime. This is the hope that sustains. This is the expectation that shapes daily living.

He is coming. Certainly. Soon. In glory. And you're watching. Waiting. Eagerly, hopefully, actively anticipating His appearing.

The Final Doxology

And now, as we close this journey through preparing for glory, we do what the redeemed have always done: we worship. We ascribe glory to the One who's preparing us for glory. We declare praise to the One who's transforming us from glory to glory.

Jude 24-25 gives us the words:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

He Is Able

Everything we've discussed—transformation, sanctification, preparation, glorification—it all depends on His ability, not yours. He is able to keep you from stumbling. Not might be able. Not trying to be able. Is able. Present tense. Current power. Constant sufficiency.

You're not keeping yourself. You're not earning your way. You're not achieving your own preparation. He's keeping you. He's preserving you. He's protecting you. He's ensuring you arrive at glory.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

This is your confidence. Not in your strength but in His power. Not in your faithfulness but in His. Not in your ability to hold on but in His ability to keep you. You're secure not because you're strong but because He's able.

He Will Present You

And notice what He's able to do: "make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy."

Stand in His presence. Not cowering. Not hiding. Not ashamed. Standing. Upright. Confident. Accepted. In the presence of His glory—the very glory that would destroy you in your natural state. But you'll stand there. Unharmed. Welcomed. Delighted in.

Blameless. Not because you never sinned. Because you've been forgiven. Cleansed. Justified. Sanctified. Glorified. All blame removed. All guilt erased. All condemnation eliminated. You'll stand blameless not through your righteousness but through Christ's righteousness credited to you.

With great joy. Not reluctantly admitted. Not barely squeezed into heaven. Welcomed joyfully. Celebrated gladly. Received with great joy—His joy and yours. Joy over completing the journey. Joy over arriving home. Joy over seeing His face. Joy over being like Him. Joy over eternal glory finally, fully experienced.

This is what He's able to do. This is what He's doing right now through all your preparation. This is the certain outcome of His transforming work. He will present you—and every believer—in His glorious presence, blameless, joyful, perfected, complete.

All Glory to Him

And for this—for His ability, His power, His faithfulness, His work, His accomplishment—we give Him glory.

"Be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever."

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Before all time. He's always been glorious. He didn't become glorious. He's eternally glorious. Before creation, He possessed all glory. The glory you're being prepared for is participation in His eternal, preexistent glory.

And now. In this present moment. In the meantime. In the already-but-not-yet. In your current preparation. He is glorious. Worthy of praise. Deserving of worship. Even before the final revelation of glory, He's glorious now.

And forever. Eternally. Without end. Age after age. World without end. Glory that never diminishes. Majesty that never fades. Dominion that never weakens. Authority that never fails.

This is who's preparing you for glory. This is who's transforming you from glory to glory. This is who guarantees your glorification. This is who will present you blameless with great joy.

To Him—the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord—be all glory.

So How Do You Live Until Glory Comes?

Let me bring this home with practical exhortation for living in the meantime:

Remember who you are. God's workmanship. His child. His temple. His ambassador. Light in darkness. Living epistle. Citizen of heaven temporarily stationed on earth. This identity shapes everything. Live from it, not for it.

Trust what He's doing. He's preparing you for glory. Through trials. Through transformation. Through daily faithfulness. Through suffering. Through obedience. Through community. Through all of it, He's preparing you. Trust the process even when you can't see the progress.

Abide in Christ constantly. This is the foundation. The source. The power. The life. Apart from Him, nothing. In Him, everything. Daily, moment-by-moment abiding. Continuous communion. Unbroken connection. This is the life that produces fruit, displays glory, and prepares you for ultimate glory.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Saturate yourself in Scripture. The Word transforms by renewing your mind. It reveals God's character. It shows Christ's glory. It promises future hope. It instructs for present living. Read it. Meditate on it. Memorize it. Obey it. Let it dwell in you richly.

Stay in community. You can't do this alone. Iron sharpens iron. The body builds itself up in love. You need others. Others need you. Don't isolate. Don't withdraw. Stay connected. Stay committed. Bear burdens. Speak truth. Encourage. Be encouraged.

Embrace suffering purposefully. Don't seek it. But when it comes, recognize it's producing eternal weight of glory. Endure faithfully. Persevere hopefully. Trust it's accomplishing something. Let it conform you to Christ. Let it deepen your faith. Let it expand your capacity for glory.

Practice resurrection now. Choose life over death. Light over darkness. Righteousness over sin. Love over selfishness. Every choice for holiness is practicing for the day when holiness will be effortless. Every act of obedience is training for eternity. Every moment of faithfulness is preparation.

Look at the unseen. Don't fix your eyes only on visible, temporal realities. Look at invisible, eternal realities. Practice seeing with eyes of faith. Cultivate eternal perspective. Let unseen realities shape seen choices. Let future glory inform present living.

Wait eagerly. Watch for Christ's return. Long for the blessed hope. Anticipate His appearing. Let "Come, Lord Jesus" be your prayer. Let readiness be your posture. Let expectation fuel your faithfulness.

Worship consistently. Give glory to God now. Don't wait for heaven to worship. Practice now what you'll do forever. Ascribe glory, majesty, dominion, authority to the One who's preparing you for glory. Let worship reorient your heart. Let praise shift your perspective. Let adoration fuel your hope.

Live all of life for God's glory. Not just "spiritual" activities. Everything. Work, rest, eating, drinking, relationships, recreation, suffering, service. All of it. Every moment. Every choice. Every word. Every action. Do it all for God's glory. Let all of life be worship. Let all of life be preparation.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

A Personal Word

If you've made it to the end of this book, you've journeyed through profound truths. You've encountered God's magnificent plan for your preparation for glory. You've seen the already-but-not-yet tension of Christian living. You've examined your identity, your transformation, your calling, your hope.

But please—please—don't let this be just information consumed. Let it be truth lived. Don't let these chapters become theological knowledge filed away. Let them become biography written in your daily choices.

Because here's the reality: You are being prepared for glory. Right now. This moment. Through whatever circumstances you're facing. Through whatever trials you're enduring. Through whatever joys you're experiencing. Through whatever calling you're pursuing. All of it—absolutely all of it—is part of God's preparation process.

He's transforming you from glory to glory. He's conforming you to Christ's image. He's producing eternal weight of glory through momentary affliction. He's preparing you to stand in His presence, blameless, with great joy.

This is certain. This is guaranteed. This is your destiny.

So don't lose heart. Though the outer man decays, the inner man is being renewed. Though trials press, glory is being produced. Though you can't yet see the full picture, you can trust the faithful Artist.

Keep abiding. Keep obeying. Keep trusting. Keep hoping. Keep watching. Keep worshiping.

Because He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6). He who calls you is faithful, and He will bring it to pass (1 Thessalonians 5:24). He is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.

The glory is coming. Certainly. Soon. Beyond all comparison.

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

And you're being prepared for it.

Live accordingly. In the already-but-not-yet. In the meantime. Until glory comes.

Benediction

May the God who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light continue to transform you from one degree of glory to another. May Christ, who is your life, be increasingly formed in you. May the Spirit, who is the guarantee of your inheritance, fill you with hope, joy, and power. May you walk worthy of your calling, abiding in the Vine, bearing much fruit, displaying His glory even now as you await greater glory to come.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Until we see Him face to face.

Amen.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus." — Revelation 22:20 (NASB)

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

APPENDIX A

Glory Passages—A Topical Scripture Index

This comprehensive index organizes key biblical passages on glory by theme, providing a reference tool for further study and meditation. All references use the NASB translation. Passages marked with an asterisk (*) are central texts explored extensively in this book.

I. GOD'S ESSENTIAL GLORY

The Nature of God's Glory

- **Exodus 33:18-23*** — Moses asks to see God's glory; God reveals His goodness
- **Exodus 34:6-7** — God's character revealed as His glory passes by
- **Psalm 19:1** — The heavens declare the glory of God
- **Psalm 24:7-10** — The King of glory described
- **Psalm 29:1-2** — Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name
- **Psalm 104:31** — May the glory of the LORD endure forever
- **Isaiah 6:1-4** — Isaiah's vision of God's glory filling the temple
- **Isaiah 40:5** — The glory of the LORD will be revealed
- **Isaiah 42:8** — "I will not give My glory to another"
- **Ezekiel 1:28** — The appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD
- **Ezekiel 43:1-5** — The glory of the God of Israel returning to the temple
- **Habakkuk 2:14** — The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
- **John 1:14** — We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father
- **John 17:5** — The glory Christ had with the Father before the world existed
- **Romans 1:20-23** — Exchanging the glory of God for created things
- **1 Timothy 1:17** — To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be honor and glory forever

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

God's Glory Displayed in Creation

- **Psalm 8:1** — How majestic is Your name in all the earth, displayed Your splendor above the heavens
- **Psalm 97:6** — The heavens declare His righteousness, all peoples see His glory
- **Romans 1:20** — God's invisible attributes clearly seen through what has been made

II. CHRIST'S GLORY

The Incarnate Glory

- **John 1:14*** — The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth
- **John 2:11** — Jesus manifested His glory in Cana
- **John 11:4** — This sickness is for the glory of God, that the Son may be glorified
- **John 11:40** — "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"
- **John 12:23-24** — The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified
- **Matthew 17:1-8** — The Transfiguration (parallel passages: Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)
- **2 Peter 1:16-18** — Eyewitnesses of His majesty on the holy mountain

Christ Glorified Through Death and Resurrection

- **John 7:39** — The Spirit not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified
- **John 12:27-28** — "Father, glorify Your name"
- **John 13:31-32** — Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him
- **John 17:1** — Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son
- **Acts 3:13** — The God of our fathers has glorified His servant Jesus
- **Philippians 2:9-11** — God highly exalted Him and bestowed the name above every name
- **1 Peter 1:21** — God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Christ's Present and Future Glory

- **Hebrews 1:3*** — He is the radiance of His glory and exact representation of His nature
- **Hebrews 2:9** — Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death
- **Revelation 1:12-18** — John's vision of the glorified Christ
- **Revelation 5:12-13** — Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory
- **Revelation 21:23** — The Lamb is the lamp of the city; the glory of God illuminates it

III. THE GLORY WE'VE LOST (FALL)

Created for Glory

- **Genesis 1:26-27** — Created in God's image and likeness
- **Psalm 8:4-5** — Made a little lower than God, crowned with glory and majesty

Glory Lost Through Sin

- **Genesis 3:7-10** — Nakedness, shame, hiding after the Fall
- **Romans 3:23*** — All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- **Romans 5:12** — Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

IV. GLORY RESTORED (REDEMPTION)

Christ's Work Restoring Glory

- **Romans 5:1-2** — We exult in hope of the glory of God
- **2 Corinthians 3:18*** — Being transformed from glory to glory
- **2 Corinthians 4:6*** — God has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of glory
- **Ephesians 1:3-6** — Blessed us with every spiritual blessing to the praise of His glory
- **Ephesians 1:17-18** — Eyes of your heart enlightened to know the glory of His inheritance
- **Colossians 1:27** — Christ in you, the hope of glory
- **Titus 2:13** — Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our God
- **1 Peter 5:10** — The God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ

V. PRESENT TRANSFORMATION (GLORY TO GLORY)

Progressive Sanctification

- **2 Corinthians 3:18*** — We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory
- **Romans 8:29** — Predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son
- **Galatians 4:19** — Until Christ is formed in you
- **Ephesians 2:10*** — We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works
- **Ephesians 4:13** — Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and mature manhood
- **Philippians 1:6*** — He who began a good work in you will perfect it
- **Philippians 2:12-13** — Work out your salvation; God is at work in you
- **Colossians 3:10** — Put on the new self being renewed to a true knowledge
- **2 Thessalonians 1:12** — That the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

The Sanctifying Power of Beholding Christ

- **John 17:17*** — Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth
- **2 Corinthians 3:18*** — Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord
- **Hebrews 12:2** — Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith
- **1 John 3:2-3*** — When He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him

VI. SUFFERING AND GLORY

Suffering Producing Glory

- **Romans 5:3-5** — We exult in tribulations, knowing tribulation brings perseverance
- **Romans 8:17*** — If we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified with Him
- **Romans 8:18*** — The sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory
- **2 Corinthians 4:16-18*** — Momentary, light affliction producing eternal weight of glory
- **2 Timothy 2:10-12** — If we endure, we will also reign with Him
- **1 Peter 1:6-7** — Tested by fire that the proof of your faith may result in praise and glory
- **1 Peter 4:12-14*** — Share the sufferings of Christ, that you may rejoice at the revelation of His glory
- **1 Peter 5:10** — After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace will perfect you

The Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings

- **Philippians 3:10*** — That I may know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings
- **Colossians 1:24** — I rejoice in my sufferings, filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions
- **Hebrews 2:10** — Perfect through sufferings the author of their salvation

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

VII. FUTURE GLORY (GLORIFICATION)

• **The Revealing of the Sons of God**

Romans 8:19-23* — Creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God

- **Colossians 3:3-4*** — Your life is hidden with Christ; when He appears, you will be revealed with Him in glory
- **1 John 3:2*** — It has not appeared as yet what we will be; we will be like Him

Eternal Weight of Glory

- **2 Corinthians 4:17*** — Momentary, light affliction producing eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison
- **1 Corinthians 2:9*** — Things eye has not seen and ear has not heard, all that God has prepared
- **2 Timothy 2:10** — Salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory
- **2 Timothy 4:18** — The Lord will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory
- **Hebrews 2:10** — Bringing many sons to glory
- **1 Peter 5:1** — A partaker of the glory that is to be revealed
- **1 Peter 5:4** — You will receive the unfading crown of glory

Glorified with Christ

- **John 17:22-24** — The glory You have given Me I have given to them; where I am, there you will be
- **Romans 8:17** — Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, glorified with Him
- **Romans 8:30*** — These He justified, these He also glorified
- **2 Thessalonians 2:14** — Obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ
- **Hebrews 2:10** — In bringing many sons to glory

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

VIII. THE BEATIFIC VISION (SEEING GOD)

Face to Face Encounter

- **Exodus 33:11** — The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend
- **Numbers 6:24-26** — The LORD make His face shine on you
- **Psalm 17:15*** — I shall be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake
- **Psalm 27:4** — To behold the beauty of the LORD
- **Matthew 5:8** — Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God
- **1 Corinthians 13:12*** — Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face
- **2 Corinthians 5:7** — We walk by faith, not by sight
- **Revelation 22:4*** — They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads

Knowing as We Are Known

- **1 Corinthians 13:12*** — Now I know in part, then I will know fully just as I have been fully known
- **Psalm 139:1-6** — O LORD, You have searched me and known me

IX. RESURRECTION GLORY (GLORIFIED BODIES)

The Promise of Resurrection

- **Job 19:25-27** — I know that my Redeemer lives, and in my flesh I shall see God
- **Daniel 12:2-3** — Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse
- **Matthew 22:30** — In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage
- **John 5:28-29** — All who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth
- **Romans 8:11** — He who raised Christ Jesus will give life to your mortal bodies
- **1 Corinthians 6:14** — God has not only raised the Lord but will also raise us up
- **2 Corinthians 5:1-4** — We have a building from God, a house not made with hands
- **Philippians 3:20-21*** — He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with His glory
- **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** — The dead in Christ will rise first

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Qualities of the Resurrection Body

- **1 Corinthians 15:35-58*** — The most comprehensive passage on resurrection bodies
- **1 Corinthians 15:42-44*** — Sown perishable, raised imperishable; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown natural, raised spiritual
- **1 Corinthians 15:49** — We will bear the image of the heavenly
- **1 Corinthians 15:51-53** — We will all be changed; this perishable must put on imperishable
- **Matthew 13:43** — The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father
- **Luke 24:36-43** — Jesus's resurrection body as the pattern

Christ: The Firstfruits

- **1 Corinthians 15:20-23*** — Christ the firstfruits; those who are Christ's at His coming
- **Colossians 1:18** — He is the firstborn from the dead

X. CREATION'S GLORY

Creation Groaning for Glory

- **Romans 8:19-22*** — Creation waits eagerly; subjected to futility; groaning together
- **Romans 8:21** — Creation will be set free into the freedom of the glory of the children of God

New Heavens and New Earth

- **Isaiah 65:17-25** — Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth
- **Isaiah 66:22** — The new heavens and new earth which I make will endure
- **2 Peter 3:10-13** — New heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells
- **Revelation 21:1-5** — I saw a new heaven and a new earth; behold, I am making all things new
- **Revelation 21:10-11, 23** — The holy city having the glory of God; no need of sun or moon
- **Revelation 22:1-5** — The river of life; they will see His face; they will reign forever

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

XI. GLORY IN WORSHIP AND PRAISE

Ascribing Glory to God

- **1 Chronicles 16:28-29** — Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength; bring an offering and come before Him
- **Psalm 29:1-2** — Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name
- **Psalm 96:3, 7-8** — Tell of His glory among the nations; ascribe to the LORD glory and strength
- **Psalm 115:1** — Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory
- **Luke 2:14** — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
- **Romans 11:36** — To Him be the glory forever. Amen
- **Romans 16:27** — To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever
- **Galatians 1:5** — To whom be the glory forevermore. Amen
- **Ephesians 3:20-21** — To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations
- **Philippians 4:20** — To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever
- **1 Timothy 1:17** — To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be honor and glory forever
- **Hebrews 13:21** — To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen
- **1 Peter 4:11** — So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ
- **2 Peter 3:18** — To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity
- **Revelation 4:9-11** — The living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne
- **Revelation 5:12-13** — Worthy is the Lamb to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing
- **Revelation 7:12** — Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God
- **Jude 24-25*** — To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Shekinah Glory in the Tabernacle/Temple

- **Exodus 40:34-35** — The cloud covered the tent; the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle
- **1 Kings 8:10-11** — The cloud filled the house of the LORD; the glory of the LORD filled the house
- **2 Chronicles 7:1-3** — Fire came down from heaven; the glory of the LORD filled the house
- **Ezekiel 10:4, 18-19** — The glory of the LORD departing from the temple
- **Haggai 2:7, 9** — I will fill this house with glory; latter glory of this house will be greater than the former

XII. LIVING FOR GOD'S GLORY

All of Life for Glory

- **1 Corinthians 10:31*** — Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God
- **Romans 12:1** — Present your bodies a living sacrifice
- **Colossians 3:17** — Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus
- **Colossians 3:23** — Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord
- **1 Peter 4:11** — Whoever serves is to do so by the strength which God supplies, so that God may be glorified

Bearing Fruit to God's Glory

- **John 15:8** — My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit
- **Philippians 1:11** — Filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God
- **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12** — That the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you

Good Works That Glorify God

- **Matthew 5:16*** — Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father
- **1 Peter 2:12** — Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that they may glorify God

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

XIII. ABIDING IN GLORY

Union with Christ

- **John 15:1-11*** — Abide in Me, and I in you; that My joy may be in you
- **John 17:20-23** — That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You
- **Romans 6:5** — United with Him in the likeness of His death and resurrection
- **1 Corinthians 1:30** — By His doing you are in Christ Jesus
- **Galatians 2:20** — I have been crucified with Christ; Christ lives in me
- **Ephesians 3:17** — That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith
- **Colossians 2:10** — In Him you have been made complete
- **Colossians 3:3** — You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God

XIV. MISCELLANEOUS KEY GLORY PASSAGES

The Transfiguration

- **Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36** — Jesus transfigured; His face shone like the sun
- **2 Peter 1:16-18** — Eyewitnesses of His majesty; received honor and glory from God the Father

Glory in Heaven

- **Revelation 4:1-11** — The throne room of heaven; twenty-four elders casting crowns
- **Revelation 15:8** — The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God
- **Revelation 21:11** — The city having the glory of God; her brilliance like a very costly stone
- **Revelation 21:24-26** — The nations will walk by its light; the glory and honor of the nations brought into it

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Giving Glory in All Things

- **Luke 17:15-18** — The healed leper returning to give glory to God
- **Acts 12:23** — Herod struck down because he did not give God the glory
- **Romans 4:20** — Abraham gave glory to God
- **1 Corinthians 6:20** — You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body

Warnings Against Stealing Glory

- **Isaiah 48:11** — My glory I will not give to another
- **Jeremiah 2:11** — My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit
- **Daniel 4:30, 37** — Nebuchadnezzar's pride and restoration
- **John 5:44** — How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another?
- **John 12:43** — They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God

XV. THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL

- **2 Corinthians 4:4** — The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ
- **2 Corinthians 4:6** — God has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ
- **1 Timothy 1:11** — The gospel of the glory of the blessed God

HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

This topical index is designed for:

Personal Study: When you want to go deeper into a specific aspect of glory, use this index to find related passages for meditation and study.

Topical Research: Preparing to teach or write about a particular dimension of glory? This index provides a comprehensive starting point.

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Devotional Reading: Select a category and read through all the passages, letting Scripture speak comprehensively on that theme.

Memorization: Choose key passages from each category (marked with asterisks for central texts) to commit to memory.

Quick Reference: When you remember "there's a passage about..." but can't recall the exact reference, scan the appropriate category to locate it.

Sermon/Teaching Preparation: Build messages around biblical themes of glory using these organized references.

Prayer: Use these passages to pray Scripture back to God, declaring His glory and claiming His promises.

Note: While this index is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive. The Bible contains many more references to glory than can be included here. This collection focuses on passages most directly relevant to the themes explored in *Preparing for His Glory*. Consider this a starting point for your own exploration of glory throughout Scripture.

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." — **Romans 11:36 (NASB)**

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APPENDIX B

Theological Definitions

A

This glossary provides clear, concise definitions of key theological terms used throughout *Preparing for His Glory*. These definitions are grounded in historic Christian orthodoxy and Reformed theology, presented in accessible language for practical understanding.

Abiding

The continuous, vital connection between the believer and Christ, depicted in John 15:1-11 through the metaphor of the vine and branches. Abiding is not occasional visitation but constant dwelling—remaining in unbroken communion with Christ as the source of spiritual life, transformation, and fruitfulness. It is the prerequisite for bearing fruit and the foundation of Christian living.

Adoption

The legal act by which God places believers into His family as His children, granting them all the rights, privileges, and inheritance belonging to sons and daughters. Unlike justification (which addresses legal standing before the Judge) or regeneration (which addresses spiritual rebirth), adoption specifically addresses family relationship. See Romans 8:15-17, Galatians 4:4-7, Ephesians 1:5.

Already/Not Yet

The theological tension describing the Christian's current state: already saved, justified, and regenerated, but not yet glorified, perfected, or experiencing the fullness of redemption. This framework recognizes that Christ's kingdom has already been inaugurated through His first coming but not yet consummated (awaiting His second coming). Believers live between two advents, experiencing present realities of salvation while awaiting future completion.

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Ambassador

A believer's role as Christ's official representative in the world, carrying the message of reconciliation and representing the kingdom of heaven while stationed in earthly contexts. See 2 Corinthians 5:20, Ephesians 6:20. Ambassadors speak with delegated authority, represent interests beyond their own, and maintain loyalty to the kingdom they represent rather than the territory where they're stationed.

B

Beatific Vision

From Latin *beatus* (blessed) and *visio* (seeing)—the direct, unmediated, face-to-face sight of God that will be experienced by believers in glory. This vision is the ultimate satisfaction of the human soul, producing perfect blessedness and complete joy. It involves seeing God as He truly is (1 John 3:2), knowing Him fully as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12), and beholding His face (Revelation 22:4). The beatific vision represents the consummation of relationship with God and the ultimate source of eternal joy.

Beholding

The sustained, focused gazing upon Christ's glory that produces transformation. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the word *katoptrizō* (beholding as in a mirror) describes not casual glancing but intent contemplation. Biblical beholding occurs through Scripture reading, worship, prayer, meditation, and communion. The principle is clear: you become like what you behold. Sustained gazing at Christ transforms believers from glory to glory.

C

Calling (Effectual)

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God's powerful summons that not only invites but actually brings a person to salvation. While the general call of the gospel goes out to all who hear it, the effectual call is the Spirit's work that regenerates the heart and draws a person irresistibly to Christ. Those whom God effectually calls always respond in faith because the call itself creates the response it requires. See Romans 8:28-30, 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

Conformity to Christ

The process and goal of sanctification whereby believers are progressively transformed into the image of Christ in character, thought, affection, and will. God's ultimate purpose for every believer is conformity to His Son (Romans 8:29). This conformity involves both progressive transformation in this life (sanctification) and complete transformation at glorification. It is accomplished through the Spirit's work, not human effort, though human cooperation is involved.

Consecration

The act of being set apart or dedicating something wholly to God for His purposes. In the Old Testament, this applied to priests, vessels, and places. In the New Testament, believers are called to present themselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), consecrating their bodies, gifts, resources, and entire lives to God's service and glory.

D

Depravity (Total)

The biblical teaching that sin has affected every part of human nature—mind, will, emotions, and body—rendering humanity incapable of saving itself or choosing God apart from divine grace. "Total" doesn't mean people are as evil as they could be, but that sin has touched every aspect of human existence and that no one seeks God naturally (Romans 3:10-12). Total depravity necessitates divine initiative in salvation.

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E

Election

God's sovereign choice before the foundation of the world to save certain individuals for His glory. Election is unconditional (not based on foreseen faith or merit), eternal (made before creation), and effectual (those elected will certainly be saved). See Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 9:11-16, 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Election demonstrates the grace of salvation—that it originates entirely in God's mercy rather than human achievement.

Eternal Life

Not merely endless existence (which all humans will have), but a quality of life characterized by knowing God (John 17:3), fellowship with Christ, freedom from sin and death, and participation in God's glory. Eternal life begins at regeneration (present possession—John 5:24) and is consummated in glorification (future perfection—1 John 3:2). It is both a present reality and a future hope.

F

Faith

The gift of God (Ephesians 2:8) by which a person trusts in Christ alone for salvation, resting completely on His finished work rather than personal merit. Saving faith involves three elements: knowledge (understanding gospel truth), assent (believing it's true), and trust (personally relying on Christ). Faith is the instrument through which we receive justification, though faith itself does not merit salvation—Christ's work does. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

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Firstfruits

A biblical concept referring to the first portion of harvest offered to God as acknowledgment that the full harvest belongs to Him and will follow. Christ is the firstfruits of resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23)—His rising guarantees that all believers will also be raised. The Spirit is the firstfruits of our inheritance (Romans 8:23)—a down payment guaranteeing the full inheritance to come.

G

Glorification

The final stage of salvation in which believers are completely, instantaneously, and permanently transformed into perfect conformity with Christ, receiving resurrection bodies and being made fit for eternal life in God's presence. Glorification completes what justification declared and sanctification progressively accomplished. It occurs at Christ's return (or at death for the soul, with bodily glorification awaiting resurrection). Romans 8:30 speaks of glorification in past tense from God's eternal perspective, though it remains future from our temporal perspective.

Glory (God's)

The radiant manifestation of God's character, nature, and perfection. God's glory is His essential excellence made visible—His holiness, power, wisdom, love, and majesty revealed and displayed. While God possesses inherent glory eternally, He manifests His glory in creation (Psalm 19:1), in redemption (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14), and supremely in Christ (John 1:14, Hebrews 1:3). God's glory is the ultimate purpose of all things (Romans 11:36).

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Glory (Human)

The honor, splendor, and weight of eternal significance that belongs to redeemed humanity. Humanity was created to reflect God's glory as image-bearers (Genesis 1:26-27) but lost that glory through sin (Romans 3:23). Through Christ, glory is being restored (2 Corinthians 3:18) and will be fully revealed at the consummation (Romans 8:18-19, Colossians 3:4). Human glory is always derivative—reflecting God's glory, not competing with it.

Gospel

Literally "good news"—the message that God has provided salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel declares that Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16), offering forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, adoption, and eternal life as free gifts received through faith alone.

Grace

God's unmerited favor and undeserved kindness toward sinners. Grace is not God giving us what we deserve (that would be justice) or God not giving us what we deserve (that would be mercy), but God giving us the opposite of what we deserve. Grace is the foundation of salvation from beginning to end (Ephesians 2:8-9), the means of sanctification (Titus 2:11-12), and the basis for eternal hope. Grace always operates according to God's sovereign initiative, not human merit.

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H

Holy/Holiness

Set apart for God; separate from sin. Holiness has two aspects: positional (being set apart to God) and practical (being morally pure and righteous). God is absolutely holy—completely separate from and opposed to all sin. Believers are declared positionally holy at justification (sanctified in Christ) and are being made practically holy through progressive sanctification. Ultimate holiness is achieved at glorification.

I

Image of God (Imago Dei)

The unique status of humanity as created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). This includes capacity for relationship with God, moral consciousness, rationality, creativity, dominion over creation, and reflection of God's character. The image was marred by the Fall but is being restored in redemption (Colossians 3:10) and will be perfected in glorification. Christ is the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15), and believers are being conformed to His image (Romans 8:29).

Imperishable

Incorruptible; unable to decay, die, or be destroyed. This describes the resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:42), the heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 1:4), and eternal life itself. Imperishability is the opposite of the corruption and decay that characterize all earthly, temporal realities under the curse of sin.

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Imputation

The legal crediting or reckoning of something to someone's account. In salvation, three key imputations occur: (1) Adam's sin is imputed to all humanity (Romans 5:12-19), (2) our sin is imputed to Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21), and (3) Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers at justification (Romans 4:3-6, 22-24). Imputation is a legal declaration, not an infusion of actual righteousness—it's about status, not substance.

J

Justification

The legal declaration by God that a sinner is righteous through faith in Christ. Justification is a one-time, completed act (not a process) in which God declares the believing sinner to be perfectly righteous based on Christ's perfect righteousness credited to them. It involves both the forgiveness of sins (negative) and the crediting of Christ's righteousness (positive). Justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and results in peace with God (Romans 5:1). See Romans 3:21-26, 4:1-8, Galatians 2:16.

K

Kingdom of God

God's sovereign rule and reign, both in the present (inaugurated through Christ's first coming) and in the future (consummated at His second coming). The kingdom is already present wherever Christ is acknowledged as King, but not yet fully realized until He returns to establish it completely. Citizens of the kingdom live under God's authority, embody kingdom values, and anticipate its full manifestation.

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M

Mediator

One who stands between two parties to reconcile them. Christ is the one Mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5), perfectly representing both parties because He is fully God and fully man. As Mediator, Christ represents us before God (advocacy, intercession) and represents God to us (revelation, salvation). No other mediator is needed or permitted.

Mortification

The putting to death of sin and sinful patterns through the Spirit's power. Romans 8:13 commands, "if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Mortification is the negative aspect of sanctification (putting off sin), which works together with vivification (putting on righteousness). It's not achieved through human willpower but through reliance on the Spirit's power and identification with Christ's death.

N

New Creation

The radical transformation that occurs at regeneration, making the believer a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old has passed away; the new has come. This involves more than improvement or reform—it's death and resurrection, darkness becoming light, spiritual death becoming spiritual life. New creation is both personal (individual believers transformed) and cosmic (all creation will be renewed—Revelation 21:5). Believers are the firstfruits of the new creation.

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P

Perseverance of the Saints

The doctrine that all truly regenerate believers will continue in faith and finally arrive at glory because they are kept by God's power. True believers may stumble and fall into sin but will never totally or finally fall away from grace. Perseverance is ultimately God's work (Philippians 1:6, 1 Peter 1:5, Jude 24), though believers are called to active faith, obedience, and endurance. Also called "eternal security" or "preservation of the saints."

Pneumatology

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit—His person, work, and ministry. The Spirit's work includes: conviction of sin, regeneration, indwelling believers, sealing, sanctification, empowering for service, illuminating Scripture, producing fruit, distributing gifts, interceding in prayer, and guaranteeing the believer's inheritance. The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—fully God, coequal and coeternal with the Father and Son.

Propitiation

The satisfaction of God's wrath against sin through Christ's sacrificial death. Christ's death didn't just demonstrate love or provide an example—it actually appeased God's righteous anger against sin by fully satisfying the demands of divine justice. See Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, 4:10. Propitiation is distinct from expiation (removal of sin) and reconciliation (restoration of relationship), though all three occurred through Christ's death.

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R

Reconciliation

The restoration of peaceful relationship between God and humanity, achieved through Christ's death. Sin created enmity; reconciliation removes it. God reconciled us to Himself through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21), and believers are called to be ministers of this reconciliation, extending the invitation: "Be reconciled to God." Reconciliation addresses the relational breach caused by sin, while justification addresses the legal problem.

Redemption

The act of purchasing freedom by paying a ransom. Christ redeemed believers from slavery to sin, death, and the curse of the law by paying the price with His own blood (Ephesians 1:7, Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 1:18-19). Redemption involves both liberation (freedom from bondage) and acquisition (purchased to belong to God). The price has been fully paid; no additional payment is needed or possible.

Regeneration

The supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that imparts spiritual life to a person spiritually dead in sin. Also called being "born again" (John 3:3-8) or "made alive" (Ephesians 2:5). Regeneration is instantaneous, monergistic (God's work alone), and creates the capacity and desire to respond to the gospel in faith. It precedes faith logically (though not necessarily temporally) because a spiritually dead person cannot believe until made spiritually alive.

Repentance

A change of mind and heart about sin and Christ that results in turning from sin to God. True repentance involves godly sorrow over sin (not merely sorrow over consequences), hatred of sin, and turning to Christ. It's both a one-time act at conversion and an ongoing practice in the Christian life. Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25), not a human achievement.

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Resurrection

The raising of the physical body from death to life. Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits, guaranteeing all believers will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). The resurrection body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)—the same body transformed for eternal existence. Resurrection is physical, not merely spiritual, and will occur at Christ's return.

Righteousness (Imputed)

Christ's perfect righteousness credited to the believer's account at justification. This is alien righteousness—not produced by the believer but belonging to Christ and graciously given. God declares believers righteous based on Christ's righteousness, not their own. This imputed righteousness is the legal basis for justification.

Righteousness (Imparted)

The actual, internal transformation of character that occurs progressively through sanctification as the Holy Spirit produces righteousness in the believer's life. Unlike imputed righteousness (instantaneous, complete, legal), imparted righteousness is gradual, incomplete (in this life), and experiential. Both are necessary: imputed righteousness for justification before God; imparted righteousness for transformation unto godliness.

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S

Sanctification

The process of being made holy—set apart from sin and unto God. Sanctification has three aspects:

- **Positional (Definitive):** Believers are set apart to God at conversion (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- **Progressive (Experiential):** Believers are being made practically holy through the Spirit's work (2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 2:12-13)
- **Perfect (Complete):** Believers will be completely holy at glorification (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Sanctification is synergistic (God and believer cooperate—Philippians 2:12-13), progressive (from glory to glory), and certain (will be completed—Philippians 1:6).

Shekinah Glory

From Hebrew *shakan* (to dwell)—the visible, radiant manifestation of God's presence, particularly in the Old Testament. The Shekinah glory filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), appeared as a pillar of cloud and fire leading Israel, and was seen by the prophets. In the New Testament, this glory is supremely manifested in Christ (John 1:14—"dwelt" is related to *shakan*) and now dwells in believers as temples of the Holy Spirit.

Sin (Original)

The inherent corruption of human nature inherited from Adam that affects all humanity. Original sin includes both inherited guilt (Romans 5:12-19) and inherited corruption (total depravity). Every person is born with a sin nature that predisposes toward sin and away from God. Original sin is distinct from actual sins (specific sinful thoughts and actions) but produces them inevitably.

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Sovereignty of God

God's absolute authority, control, and rule over all creation. Nothing occurs outside God's sovereign will and purpose. God's sovereignty extends over all things—from cosmic events to individual choices, from salvation to daily circumstances. This doesn't eliminate human responsibility but establishes that God's purposes will ultimately prevail. See Psalm 115:3, Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11.

T

Total Depravity

See **Depravity (Total)**

Transformation

The radical, ongoing change from one state to another—specifically, from conformity to the world to conformity to Christ. Transformation occurs through the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2), beholding Christ's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), and the Spirit's sanctifying work. It's both instantaneous (at regeneration—new creation) and progressive (through sanctification—from glory to glory). Ultimate transformation occurs at glorification.

Tribulation

Affliction, distress, or suffering—particularly suffering experienced in this fallen world or for the sake of Christ. Jesus promised, "In the world you have tribulation" (John 16:33). Paul teaches that tribulation produces endurance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3-5) and is producing eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Tribulation is expected, purposeful, and temporary compared to coming glory.

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U

Union with Christ

The believer's vital, spiritual connection with Christ, established at regeneration and maintained throughout eternity. Union with Christ is the foundation for all salvation benefits—we are justified in union with Christ, sanctified in union with Christ, and will be glorified in union with Christ. This union is described through multiple metaphors: vine and branches (John 15), head and body (Ephesians 5:23), husband and wife (Ephesians 5:31-32), foundation and building (1 Corinthians 3:11). Union with Christ is organic (real, vital), legal (establishing our status), and mystical (beyond full comprehension).

V

Vivification

The bringing to life or making alive. In salvation, vivification refers to regeneration—being made spiritually alive (Ephesians 2:5). In sanctification, vivification is the positive counterpart to mortification—putting on the new self, cultivating righteousness, practicing godliness. Both aspects (dying to sin and living to righteousness) are necessary for holiness.

W

Word of God

God's revelation to humanity, existing in three forms:

- **Christ (Incarnate Word):** The ultimate revelation of God (John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3)
- **Scripture (Written Word):** The inspired, inerrant, authoritative revelation of God's character, will, and purposes (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
- **Gospel (Proclaimed Word):** The message of salvation preached and received (Romans 10:17)

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All three forms perfectly agree because all originate from God and reveal His truth.

Workmanship (Poiema)

From Greek *poiema* (Romans 8:10), from which we get "poem"—a work of art, masterpiece, or creation. Paul declares believers are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. This emphasizes that believers are God's artwork, His masterpiece, His creative work—not self-made but divinely crafted. The term suggests intentionality, beauty, purpose, and value in God's eyes.

Works (Good)

Actions that flow from faith, are done for God's glory, and align with His will. Good works are not the means of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9) but are the necessary fruit of salvation (Ephesians 2:10, James 2:14-26). They don't earn merit with God but demonstrate genuine faith and bring glory to God. True good works must have the right source (faith), motive (God's glory), and standard (God's Word).

HOW TO USE THIS GLOSSARY

For Study: When you encounter an unfamiliar term in the main text, consult this glossary for clear definition and biblical grounding.

For Teaching: Use these definitions to explain theological concepts to others with clarity and accuracy.

For Meditation: Don't just read definitions—reflect on their implications. How does understanding justification affect your daily life? How does grasping union with Christ change your perspective on trials?

For Reference: When discussing theology with others, these definitions provide common ground and precise language.

For Growth: Understanding these terms deepens your comprehension of God's work in salvation and prepares you to read Scripture with greater insight.

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A Final Word on Definitions

Theology is not merely academic exercise—it's the study of God and His ways, which should always lead to worship, transformation, and faithful living. These definitions are meant to clarify truth, not complicate it; to illuminate Scripture, not replace it; to serve understanding that leads to godliness, not knowledge that puffs up.

As you engage with these theological terms, remember the goal: knowing God more fully, loving Christ more deeply, walking in the Spirit more faithfully, and being prepared more thoroughly for the glory that is to be revealed.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." — Romans 8:28-30 (NASB)

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APPENDIX C

Study Questions for Personal or Group Use

These questions are designed to help you engage more deeply with the content of each chapter, whether you're studying alone or discussing with a group. Personal reflection questions encourage honest self-examination; group discussion questions facilitate meaningful conversation about applying these truths together.

INTRODUCTION: CREATED FOR GLORY

Understanding

1. What does it mean that you are God's *poiema* (workmanship/masterpiece)? How does this differ from viewing yourself as a self-made person?
2. Explain the distinction between being created *by* good works versus *for* good works (Ephesians 2:10). Why does this matter?
3. What is the scandal Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7—that God puts treasure in earthen vessels? Why is this actually good news?

Reflection

1. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to believe you're self-made rather than God's workmanship?
2. The introduction describes God as seeing the masterpiece while chipping away excess (Michelangelo's marble metaphor). What "excess" do you sense God chipping away in your life right now?
3. How does knowing you were created *for* good works (not *by* them) change your motivation for living righteously?

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Application

1. This week, when will you intentionally remind yourself: "I am God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that He prepared beforehand"?
2. What's one area where you need to stop striving to become usable and start resting in being God's workmanship?

PART ONE: THE FOUNDATION OF GLORY

CHAPTER 1: HIS WORKMANSHIP—CRAFTED WITH PURPOSE

Understanding

1. What does *poiema* mean, and why is it significant that Paul uses this word to describe believers?
2. Explain the potter's hands imagery from Isaiah 64:8 and Jeremiah 18:1-6. What happens when vessels become spoiled?
3. What is the critical distinction between being created *for* good works versus *by* good works?

Reflection

1. When do you most struggle to believe you're God's masterpiece rather than a damaged product?
2. The chapter states, "Stop striving to become usable; you're already His workmanship." What does this look like practically in your life?
3. In what ways do you sometimes act as if you're the potter rather than the clay?

Application

1. What "prepared path" (good works prepared beforehand) do you sense God has for you right now?
2. Where do you need to surrender control and trust the Potter's hands this week?

CHAPTER 2: WHAT EYE HAS NOT SEEN—THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE PREPARATION

Understanding

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. What does 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 teach about the scope of God's preparation for those who love Him?
2. What is the "danger of domesticated expectations" described in this chapter?
3. How does the Holy Spirit function in revealing what God has prepared (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)?

Reflection

1. In what ways have you reduced God to manageable proportions or domesticated your expectations of what He can do?
2. The chapter states that love is the capacity-expander for receiving revelation. How does your love for God (or lack thereof) affect your capacity to receive what He's prepared?
3. Consider the "already-but-not-yet" tension: How do you experience this in your spiritual life?

Application

1. What would change in your daily life if you truly believed God has prepared incomprehensible things for you?
2. How can you cultivate deeper love for God this week as a means of expanding your capacity for what He's prepared?

CHAPTER 3: THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL—FROM FAITH TO FAITH

Understanding

1. Explain the three dimensions of the gospel: penalty (past), power (present), and presence (future) of sin.
2. What does "from faith to faith" mean in Romans 1:17?
3. Distinguish between imputed righteousness (justification) and imparted righteousness (sanctification).

Reflection

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1. Which aspect of the gospel (past penalty, present power, or future presence) do you most often forget in daily living?
2. Are you living *from* righteousness (already accepted) or *for* righteousness (trying to earn acceptance)? How can you tell?
3. The chapter describes faith as the channel, not the source, of God's power. When do you slip into treating your faith as the power source itself?

Application

1. What does it look like practically to "preach the gospel to yourself daily"?
2. In what specific situation this week do you need to remember and apply the gospel's present power (not just its past penalty)?

PART TWO: THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

CHAPTER 4: UNVEILED FACES—THE MIRROR OF GLORY

Understanding

1. What was the problem with the Israelites that required a veil (Exodus 34, 2 Corinthians 3:14-15)?
2. Explain the meaning of *katoptrizō* (beholding as in a mirror) in 2 Corinthians 3:18.
3. What does it mean that transformation is in the passive voice? Who is doing the transforming?

Reflection

1. What "veil" most often prevents you from beholding Christ clearly (self-focus, sin, distraction, unbelief)?
2. The chapter states, "You become like what you behold." What are you spending most of your time beholding, and what is it making you become?
3. How does "living unveiled" (radical honesty with God) challenge your current spiritual practice?

Application

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. What practical steps will you take this week to behold Christ more consistently (Scripture, worship, meditation, prayer)?
2. Where do you need to "remove the veil" and come before God with greater honesty and transparency?

CHAPTER 5: THE REFINER'S FIRE—PREPARATION THROUGH TRIALS

Understanding

1. What is the purpose of the refiner's fire according to Malachi 3:2-3?
2. Trace the progression in James 1:2-4: testing produces what, which produces what, which results in what?
3. How does 2 Corinthians 4:17 contextualize present affliction within eternal reality?

Reflection

1. What trial are you currently facing that feels more like destruction than refinement? How does the refiner's fire image reshape your perspective?
2. The chapter warns against becoming bitter in trials. What early warning signs of bitterness do you notice in yourself?
3. Can you identify "proven character" that has emerged in you through past trials?

Application

1. In your current difficulty, what might God be refining out of you (dross) and what might He be developing in you (gold)?
2. How can you "look for purpose" rather than just "endure duration" in the trial you're facing?

CHAPTER 6: CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST—DEATH BEFORE GLORY

Understanding

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1. What does Jesus mean in John 12:24 about a grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying?
2. Explain the difference between self-improvement and Christ-replacement.
3. What does Paul mean by "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20)?

Reflection

1. What areas of "self" keep wanting to reclaim the throne each morning?
2. The chapter describes the exchanged life—not improved self but replaced self. How does this challenge your approach to spiritual growth?
3. Where are you most resistant to daily dying? What self-constructed identity are you clinging to?

Application

1. What would it look like to practice "daily surrender" at the start of each day this week?
2. Identify one specific area where you need to stop trying to improve yourself and instead let Christ's life replace yours.

PART THREE: THE MANIFESTATION OF GLORY

CHAPTER 7: VESSELS OF GLORY—TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

Understanding

1. Why does God intentionally choose to put treasure in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7)?
2. What is the distinction between ink and Spirit, between stone and hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3)?
3. How does the Spirit write on tablets of human hearts (Ezekiel 36:26-27)?

Reflection

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. In what ways do you struggle to accept your identity as a "clay pot" rather than trying to be an impressive vessel?
2. The chapter states, "Your weakness isn't a problem God has to overcome. It's the platform He's chosen to showcase His power." How does this challenge your view of your limitations?
3. When have you most clearly experienced God's glory shining through your obvious weakness?

Application

1. Where do you need to stop hiding your cracks and let treasure leak out this week?
2. How can you cultivate gratitude for being a clay pot carrying divine treasure?

CHAPTER 8: CHILDREN OF LIGHT—WALKING IN HIS GLORY

Understanding

1. What's the significance of Paul saying you *were* darkness (not just *in* darkness) and now *are* light (Ephesians 5:8)?
2. Explain the three-fold fruit of light: goodness, righteousness, and truth.
3. How does Matthew 5:16 connect good works to glorifying the Father?

Reflection

1. How does understanding that identity precedes behavior (you *are* light, therefore walk as light) change your approach to Christian living?
2. Which fruit of light (goodness, righteousness, truth) is least evident in your life right now? Why?
3. The chapter asks: "Are you living as who you truly are?" How would you honestly answer?

Application

1. What's one specific way you can "walk as light" in your workplace, family, or community this week?
2. Where do you need to replace lies with truth about your identity in Christ?

CHAPTER 9: LIVING EPISTLES—VISIBLE GLORY

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

Understanding

1. What does Paul mean when he says "you are our letter...written not with ink but with the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:2-3)?
2. How does John 13:35 connect love to authentic witness?
3. Distinguish between authentic witness and religious performance.

Reflection

1. If someone were "reading your life" this week, what message would they receive about Jesus?
2. The chapter states, "The world has heard enough Christian words. What they're hungry for is evidence." What evidence of transformation is visible in your life?
3. Where is the gap widest between your words and your actions?

Application

1. Who is "reading your life" most closely right now (coworkers, family, neighbors)? What do you want them to read?
2. What's one area where you need to move from "word and tongue" to "deed and truth" (1 John 3:18)?

CHAPTER 10: AMBASSADORS OF GLORY—REPRESENTING THE KINGDOM

Understanding

1. What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)?
2. Explain the ministry of reconciliation described in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.
3. How does Philippians 3:20 describe the relationship between earthly citizenship and heavenly citizenship?

Reflection

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. Are you representing Christ's interests or your own in your daily activities? How can you tell?
2. The chapter describes ambassadors as living in foreign territory while representing their home kingdom. How does this image shape your approach to culture?
3. When do you most struggle to remember you're an ambassador rather than a permanent resident of earth?

Application

1. What's one specific way you can represent the kingdom of heaven in your current earthly context this week?
2. To whom do you need to extend Christ's invitation: "Be reconciled to God"?

PART FOUR: THE DAILY PRACTICE OF GLORY

CHAPTER 11: ABIDING IN GLORY—THE PREREQUISITE OF PRESENCE

Understanding

1. What does Jesus mean by "abide" in John 15:4-5? How is this different from occasional visits?
2. Explain the distinction between fruit and works. Why does this matter?
3. What is the consequence of not abiding according to John 15:5?

Reflection

1. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current level of abiding in Christ? What makes you rate it that way?
2. The chapter states, "You don't bear fruit by trying harder. You bear fruit by abiding deeper." Where are you striving instead of abiding?
3. What most often disrupts your abiding—distraction, busyness, sin, unbelief, or something else?

Application

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. What does "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) look like practically in your daily schedule?
2. Choose one specific practice to deepen your abiding this week (Scripture meditation, worship, continuous prayer, practicing God's presence).

CHAPTER 12: THE WORD OF GLORY—TRANSFORMATION THROUGH TRUTH

Understanding

1. What does Jesus mean when He prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17)?
2. Explain the four contrasts in Romans 12:2 between being conformed and being transformed.
3. How is Scripture like a mirror according to James 1:23-25?

Reflection

1. When was the last time Scripture actually *changed* you (not just informed or inspired you)? What changed?
2. Are you reading Scripture primarily for information, inspiration, or transformation? How can you tell?
3. What lies have you believed that need to be replaced with biblical truth?

Application

1. What would change if you approached Bible reading as "eating and digesting truth" (Jeremiah 15:16) rather than just completing a reading plan?
2. Choose one passage to meditate on deeply this week. What does meditation (versus just reading) look like for you?

CHAPTER 13: THE COMMUNITY OF GLORY—IRON SHARPENING IRON

Understanding

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. What does the body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 teach about individual believers' relationship to the church?
2. How does Proverbs 27:17 ("iron sharpens iron") describe the sanctification process in community?
3. What does it mean to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)?

Reflection

1. John Wesley said, "The New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion." How does this challenge or affirm your approach to spiritual growth?
2. Are you more prone to truth without love (harshness) or love without truth (compromise)? Why?
3. Who has permission to speak into your life with honest accountability? If no one, why not?

Application

1. What practical step will you take this week to deepen community: joining a group, inviting someone into your real life, speaking truth, or receiving correction?
2. Who needs you to bear their burden right now (Galatians 6:2)?

CHAPTER 14: SUFFERING FOR GLORY—THE PATH OF THE CROSS

Understanding

1. Why does Peter say "do not be surprised" at suffering (1 Peter 4:12)?
2. Trace the progression in Romans 5:3-5: tribulation produces what, which produces what, which produces what?
3. How does 2 Corinthians 4:17 compare present suffering to future glory?

Reflection

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. What trial are you currently facing that feels overwhelming? How does "momentary, light affliction producing eternal weight of glory" reshape your perspective?
2. The chapter distinguishes between suffering for righteousness, suffering from trials, suffering from consequences, and suffering in spiritual warfare. Which type are you experiencing?
3. When have you experienced intimacy with Christ in suffering that you couldn't know in ease?

Application

1. In your current difficulty, how can you "look for purpose" rather than just "endure duration"?
2. What would change if you truly believed this suffering is producing eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison?

PART FIVE: THE ULTIMATE GLORY

CHAPTER 15: THE REVEALING OF SONS—GLORY MANIFESTED

Understanding

1. What is creation waiting for according to Romans 8:19-21?
2. Explain the triple groaning in Romans 8:22-26 (creation, believers, Spirit).
3. What does Colossians 3:3-4 mean by saying your life is "hidden with Christ in God"?

Reflection

1. How does knowing creation itself is waiting for your glorification affect your sense of significance?
2. The chapter describes the "already-but-not-yet" tension. Which side of this tension do you lean toward (overemphasizing present reality or future hope)?
3. What does it mean to you personally that when Christ is revealed, you will be revealed with Him in glory?

Application

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. How should creation's anticipation of your revealing shape how you live now?
2. What groaning (longing for completion) do you most deeply feel? How can you express that to God honestly while maintaining hope?

CHAPTER 16: FACE TO FACE—THE BEATIFIC VISION

Understanding

1. What does Paul mean by seeing "in a mirror dimly" now versus "face to face" then (1 Corinthians 13:12)?
2. Explain the promise of Revelation 22:4 that "they will see His face."
3. What is the beatific vision, and why is it the ultimate satisfaction?

Reflection

1. The chapter describes an "inconsolable longing" that nothing earthly can satisfy. Do you recognize this in yourself?
2. How does knowing you'll one day see God face to face affect how you pursue knowing Him now?
3. What do you think you'll see in God's face when you finally behold Him (love, joy, beauty, truth)?

Application

1. How can you "look at the unseen" this week through Scripture, worship, prayer, and meditation?
2. What earthly beauty or joy can you allow to point you toward the Ultimate Beauty you'll behold face to face?

CHAPTER 17: GLORIFIED BODIES—THE RESURRECTION HOPE

Understanding

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. What are the four contrasts Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 between the body sown and the body raised?
2. How is Christ the "firstfruits" of resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23)?
3. What does Philippians 3:20-21 promise about bodily transformation?

Reflection

1. How does understanding that your body will be raised (not just your soul preserved) affect how you view physical existence?
2. The chapter states, "Your body matters to God." Do you live as if this is true? How or how not?
3. What aspect of the resurrection body (imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual) are you most eager to experience?

Application

1. How should the promise of bodily resurrection affect how you steward your current body?
2. How can resurrection hope help you face physical weakness, aging, disease, or disability with greater confidence?

CHAPTER 18: ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY—BEYOND COMPARISON

Understanding

1. Explain the contrasts in 2 Corinthians 4:17: momentary vs. eternal, light vs. weighty, affliction vs. glory.
2. What does Paul mean that affliction is "producing" eternal glory (not just preceding it)?
3. How do you "look at the unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:18)?

Reflection

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. The chapter attempts to illustrate the impossibility of comparing present suffering to future glory.
Which illustration most helped you grasp this truth?
2. C.S. Lewis said those who did most for the present world thought most of the next. How does this challenge typical views of "heavenly mindedness"?
3. What would change if you truly believed present affliction is producing eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison?

Application

1. In what specific area of current suffering do you need to apply the truth of eternal weight of glory this week?
2. How can you cultivate eternal perspective in daily decisions (finances, relationships, career, use of time)?

CONCLUSION: LIVING IN THE MEANTIME—UNTIL GLORY COMES

Understanding

1. Explain the "already-but-not-yet" framework described in Titus 2:11-13.
2. How does grace instruct us to live in the present age according to Titus 2:12?
3. What is "the blessed hope" we're looking for?

Reflection

1. Which aspect of living in the meantime is most challenging for you: denying ungodliness, living righteously, or looking for Christ's return?
2. The conclusion states, "Daily choices aren't distractions from preparing for glory. Daily choices *are* preparing for glory." How does this elevate the ordinary?
3. What does it look like to persevere eagerly (Romans 8:25) rather than either giving up or passively waiting?

Application

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

1. In what specific area of daily life (work, relationships, money, speech, body) do you need to remember 1 Corinthians 10:31 ("do all to the glory of God")?
2. Complete this sentence and commit to it: "Until glory comes, I will..."

USING THESE QUESTIONS

For Personal Study

- Don't rush through questions. Sit with them. Journal responses.
- Be honest, even when answers are uncomfortable.
- Move from understanding to reflection to application—don't skip application.
- Memorize key verses from each chapter.
- Return to questions after living with the chapter's truths for a week.

For Group Discussion

- Read the chapter before meeting.
- Start with understanding questions to ensure comprehension.
- Spend most time on reflection and application questions.
- Create safe space for honest sharing.
- Pray together based on insights and applications.
- Follow up the next week on applications committed to.
- Don't feel obligated to cover all questions—depth matters more than breadth.

For Leaders

PREPARING FOR HIS GLORY

- Choose 5-7 questions that fit your group's needs and time.
- Balance understanding, reflection, and application.
- Ask follow-up questions: "What makes you say that?" "Can you give an example?" "How does that look practically?"
- Protect confidentiality—what's shared in group stays in group.
- Model vulnerability by answering questions honestly yourself.
- Point people back to Scripture, not just the book's content.
- Close with prayer specific to what was discussed.

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."— 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)