



Biblical Foundations

Rewards–Part 1

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*At death we put the signature on our
life's portrait. The paint dries.
The portrait's done. Ready or not.¹*

—Randy Alcorn

The central thesis of this book is that every believer has one shot at life, that our one shot will one day be reviewed and rewarded by the Lord, and that our life in eternity will be dramatically affected by the result of that evaluation—that what we do now has an irreversible effect on our eternity. There are permanent repercussions for what you do, think, and say. Therefore, you must take dead aim with your life. You must maximize the one shot you have because what you do with that one shot will profoundly affect your life forever.

We could call this the **Reward Principle** or the **Law of Rewards**.

To state it succinctly: *The life you live today will determine your life in eternity.*

Don't let these words pass too quickly. Let this thought percolate in your mind. Let it echo in your heart. How you live, think, and act right now, every day, will reverberate in your existence forever and ever. How you do your job, love your spouse, raise your children, serve those in need, share your financial resources, love others, and overcome temptation will set the course for your existence in the endless ages to come.

The life you live today will determine your life in eternity.

We will unpack this maxim together in the chapters that follow. But before we move on, I believe it's important to briefly set forth the biblical support for the concept of future rewards for believers because many people are quick to dismiss or diminish anything to do with that.

Rewards in Focus

Most of us have probably wondered at times if our life is really amounting to much. We recognize all too well how weak and feeble our best efforts are. We ask ourselves questions like “Does what I do every day with my life really matter? Much of it seems so mundane, routine, and even inconsequential.” Or, we secretly wonder, “Will God remember what I do here on earth? Will all the sacrifices I make for the Lord and others bring any reward in heaven or is heaven the same for every believer no matter what we do on earth?”



You might even wonder if the idea of rewards is that big a deal. When the topic of future rewards comes up, it's not uncommon to hear Christians say, "Just being in heaven will be enough. That's all the reward I need. Seeing God and spending eternity with Him is reward enough. I don't care if I get anything above that or have a front row seat. Being in the back row will be enough for me as long as I'm there."

This kind of response can sound humble and pious, and it is true that being in heaven will be infinitely better than being in hell. Who could dispute that? Every believer will praise God for all eternity for making it possible to dwell in heaven with Him.

While true as far as it goes, there is also a serious shortcoming in this kind of thinking. Receiving rewards will be a sign of God's pleasure and approval of our lives here on earth. We should seek His approval above all else. Not to mention that rewards are God's idea, not ours.

Rewards are God's doing. They were his idea, not ours. God is the one who developed the rewards, determined the criteria for awarding them, and demonstrated his grace by providing them for faithful service. Rewards arise from the heart of God. . . . Don't rob God of the joy of being a rewarding heavenly Father because you tell him you don't care. You should care. It's okay to think about your heavenly reward. God does.ⁱⁱ

The Bible commends serving God for rewards. Think about this. Jesus and the human writers of the New Testament would not have told us so much about future rewards if they didn't want us to know about them and seek them. God wants us to know that our labors and sacrifices here on earth are not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). He wants to motivate us when we are enduring difficult times. He wants us to know that life here counts for eternity, and that He graciously rewards sacrifice and faithfulness.

Because rewarding believers is God's idea, disregarding or denying eternal rewards is an insult to our gracious Father. The rewards God offers us are priceless treasures that He expects us to desire. "Christ offers us the incredible opportunity to trade temporary goods and currency for eternal rewards."ⁱⁱⁱ We have the opportunity now, by what we do and how we live, to assure ourselves of infinitely greater eternal rewards in the life to come.

According to the Bible, the all-knowing, all-seeing God is keeping track of how you're living and what you're doing for Him every day, and you have more to gain by living for Him than you can ever imagine. Rewards for serving Christ faithfully are beyond our wildest imagination. There will be differences among God's people in the coming kingdom and on into eternity depending on the degree of our faithfulness and sacrifice for our Lord. As Randy Alcorn notes, "Will God make all souls equal in heaven and thereby consider as equally valid a life of selfishness and indifference to others' needs as compared to a life kneeling in prayer and feeding the hungry and sharing the gospel? The Bible clearly answers no."^{iv}

Rewards are a big deal to God, and someday, when we stand before Him, they will be a big deal to us as well. They will be tangible evidence that we pleased the Lord with our life. For that reason, they should be important to us now, because this is the only season during which we can earn them.



Return on Investment

In order for you to see what a big deal future rewards are to God, and what a big deal they should be to you, I want to give a sampling of Scripture passages that underscore this point. There's nothing like allowing the Bible to speak for itself. You may be surprised at how much the Bible has to say about rewards. You can't read the Bible without bumping into rewards.

In the scriptural promises that follow I've italicized certain words to call attention to them. If you've never thought much about future rewards, I trust that this litany of passages will pique your interest.

Genesis 15:1—"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your *reward* shall be very great.'"

Ruth 2:12—"May the LORD *reward* your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

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Psalms 19:9-11—"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is *great reward*."

...

Proverbs 11:18—"But he who sows righteousness gets a true *reward*."

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Isaiah 62:11—"Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, "Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His *reward* is with Him, and His recompense before Him."

The theme of future rewards continues in the New Testament. The main New Testament term for rewards is the Greek word *misthos*, which occurs twenty-nine times. But there are other words that point to rewards as well, such as *repay*, *inheritance*, *treasure*, and *crown*.

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Matthew 6:5-6—"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their *reward* in full. 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."

...



Matthew 10:41—“He who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s *reward*; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s *reward*.”

Matthew 16:27—“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then *repay* every man according to his deeds.”

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Mark 9:41—“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his *reward*.”

Luke 6:35—“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your *reward* will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.”

...

Romans 2:6—“... who will *render* to each person according to his deeds.”

1 Corinthians 9:24–25—“Do you now know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives *the prize*? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”

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Peter 5:4—“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading *crown of glory*.”

James 1:12—“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the *crown of life* which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

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Revelation 2:10—“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the *crown of life*.”

...



Revelation 11:18—“. . . and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to *reward* Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great . . .”

Revelation 22:12—“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward* is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

I hope you can see for yourself that the promise of future rewards is like a golden thread that runs through the entire Bible—from Genesis to Revelation. A time of rewards is coming. God doesn't have to reward anyone for anything. He does it because He wants to! And make no mistake: Regardless of what you and I think about it, that's exactly what He's going to do.^v

Jesus Himself repeatedly promised rewards to the faithful as a motivation. He told them to put their treasure in heaven, where their money would be secure and yield a greater rate of return (Matthew 6:20). When Peter boldly asked Jesus about what he would receive some day in the kingdom for all his sacrifices on earth, Jesus answered with a powerful parable about God's payment of His workers (Matthew 19:27–20:16). Jesus also taught that every believer should long to hear those words “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21 KJV). Jesus promised His followers that, if they were faithfully, sacrificially obedient, their “reward will be great” (Luke 6:35).

The problem is that the idea of serving the Lord and others to get rewards seems mercenary at best and narcissistic at worst. Should we ever serve with rewards in view? Is it ever right to do something with eternal rewards in mind?

Probably most of what we do for the Lord and others is done without any conscious thought of reward. Imagine an American soldier in Afghanistan fighting against the brutal Taliban and courageously plowing through enemy fire to rescue his fellow soldiers. Upon his return to the States, he is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic service. What motivated him to put his life on the line? Was it the glory of a reward? No. He harbored no thought of receiving a reward because he fully expected to die. He risked his life to save his friends' lives and defend his country's freedom. In the mountains of Afghanistan, a reward was the furthest thing from his mind. It was the givers of the award who were inspired to grant it as a way of expressing gratitude for the soldier's heroism.

In the same way, we serve God and sacrifice for Him because we love Him and others. We don't serve for the reward; we serve for the Lord. “Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). Like a soldier receiving a medal, eternal rewards are simply God's way of showing that He is pleased with our service.

Having said that, working for rewards is biblical.

Scripture tells us Abraham was looking to his future reward: “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:8–10).



Moses had a reward mindset as well: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24–26).

Even Jesus longed for the final reward: “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 12:2). As He faced the horror of the cross, Jesus looked to the joy set before Him in heaven.

Moses, Abraham, and the Lord Jesus are all commended because they looked beyond the immediate struggles to the reward God had in store for them. Of course, the reward to come is not the only incentive for serving Christ, but it is *a* motivating factor. Also, we also need to remember that we don’t desire the reward for the reward itself, but because rewards are an expression that the way we lived is pleasing to the Lord. We ultimately desire rewards because they’re a reflection of Christ’s approval of us.

I hope you’re beginning to see that future rewards are real. The Bible is clear that what we do now, here on earth every day, will affect our existence in the life to come, both in the coming millennium (the future 1,000-year reign of Christ on this earth) and ultimately in the new heaven and new earth for all eternity. What you do in your life now with your one shot will have repercussions that roll on forever through the endless ages.

Rewards also incentivize us to live faithfully and work tirelessly for our Lord today. The great Reformer John Calvin said, “Most assuredly, if I had merely served man, this would have been a poor recompense; but it is my happiness that I have served Him who never fails to reward His servants to the full extent of His promise.”^{vi}

ⁱ Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 72.

ⁱⁱ Woodrow Kroll, *Facing Your Final Job Review: The Judgment Seat of Christ, Salvation, and Eternal Rewards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 44.

ⁱⁱⁱ Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards*, 21.

^{iv} Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards*, 73.

^v Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards*, 106.

^{vi} John Calvin, as cited in Ben Patterson, *Serving God: The Grand Essentials of Work & Worship*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 77.