

Shaping your eternity

We all want something to look forward to. It motivates us to keep going. In fact almost everything we do in the present is because of the future. We eat to live for tomorrow. We sleep to regain strength for the next day. We work to make money to pay for monthly bills or for a vacation. We are constantly doing things both to make the future possible and to sustain and improve it. The amazing point to consider from this is that just as you spend your life investing in sustaining and improving your future on the earth, the same is true with regard to your eternal future. In fact, almost everything you do in the present is an investment for your eternity. Look at these next verses:

Ephesians 6:6-8

'...doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.'

I Peter 3:9

'...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.'

Colossians 3:23-25

'And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.'

To summarise, when your motive is to honour God, everything you do shapes your eternity for the better. In contrast, when your motive is to dishonour God, everything you do decreases your reward in eternity. Amazing!

What are some of the principles at work here?

God always responds to what every person does whether it is good or bad. His response will come either in this life, or the next, or both.

IN THIS LIFE

Genesis 2:16-17

'And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

IN THE NEXT LIFE

Revelation 22:12

'And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.'

It is important to realise that even though we have freedom to choose what we do, for better or for worse, we do not have freedom to choose the consequences.

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Galatians 6:7

'Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.'

1 Peter 5:5

'God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.'

Romans 6:23

'For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus'

What is the deciding factor that relates to our eternal reward from God?

The deciding factor is our FAITHFULNESS; it is our loyalty toward him. Faithfulness receives a positive response from God and unfaithfulness receives a negative response. In this next passage we see God's response to the faithful and unfaithful servant.

To the faithful servant

Matthew 25:23

'His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

To the unfaithful servant

Matthew 25:26

'You wicked and lazy servant'

Understanding faithfulness

Faithfulness can be costly

Although faithfulness can be costly, it will receive an eternal reward.

Luke 6:22

'Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven.'

Faithfulness brings forth destiny

Genesis chapters 37 – 45 describe the life of Joseph. Take some time to read through these chapters. Through his life you see some very instructive points...

- If Joseph had not been faithful to God in Potiphar's house he might never have gone to prison.
- If Joseph had not gone to prison he would not have learnt the value of losing everything and discovering that God is more than enough.
- If Joseph had not learnt that God himself is more than enough through losing everything, then he would not have had the wisdom for controlling everything as ruler of Egypt.

When you are facing difficulty because of your faithfulness to God, remember these two things.

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1. Do the opposite of how you feel. Rejoice in the reward that God is building up for you.
2. Believe the opposite to how you feel. Like Joseph, God is preparing you for something you are unaware of.

Faithfulness will bring forth praise

1 Corinthians 4:5

'Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.'

Faithfulness has consequences for eternal life

Look at what Jesus said...

Matthew 16:27

'... He will reward each one according to his works,' He rewards us for what we do. From this we can understand Jesus's exhortation in this next passage.

Matthew 6:19

'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.'

Peter outlines the credibility and certainty of our eternal inheritance.

1 Peter 1:4-5

'to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'

Moses was faithful because he could see the reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

'By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.'

A FURTHER THOUGHT

If we were to do a study on the nature of God's rewards we would see that God has plans for us in heaven. Since faithfulness in this life determines the levels of reward in the next, does this mean that our faithfulness in this age determines his plans for us in heaven? These next verses seem to infer this:

Matthew 25:23

'His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Revelation 22:3

'His servants will serve Him'

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Faithfulness builds up eternal wages

Revelation 22:12

'And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.'

The word for reward in this above verse in the Greek is '*misthos*'. It is used 29 times in the New Testament and refers to what we earn, to wages.

Much of the above teaching is summed up in the following verse about the Day of Judgment.

1 Corinthians 3:14-15

'If the work that anyone has built on the foundation of Christ survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.'

This scripture tells us that everything you have ever done will be tested. All that was done in honour and faithfulness to God will receive an eternal reward, and all that was done from dishonour and unfaithfulness to God will receive no eternal reward.

It is clear that reward is a motivation for being faithful but the New Testament also gives us three other motivations for being faithful to God.

1. To be faithful for the glory of God

1 Peter 4:10-11

'As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifest grace of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ...'

2. To be faithful out of love for God

John 14:21

'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father and I will love him and show Myself to him.'

3. To be faithful out of respect for God

2 Corinthians 7:1

'Therefore, having these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

The Apostle Paul's Faithfulness and Suffering

Paul outlines the requirement on the believer to be faithful. Each believer has received a calling from God to serve and God has given each believer gifts to fulfil that calling. In the next verse Paul talks about being given '*a trust*'. This word in Greek can also be translated as '*steward*'. A steward is a manager of someone else's property. You are God's property and you are called to steward yourself faithfully before God.

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1 Corinthians 4:2

'Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful'.

In the same chapter he describes his own situation.

1 Corinthians 4:11-13

'To the present hour we both hunger and thirst and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off scouring of all things until now.'

Paul could endure the difficulties because he knew that his faithfulness was building up reward in heaven. He knew that remaining faithful despite his difficulties and suffering was not only the right thing to do, but that it had eternal benefit. Or in other words he knew that his faithfulness to God in this life SHAPED HIS ETERNITY. The same is true for you - do you realise that all that you do in this life shapes your eternity?

Some final thoughts

- EXHORTATION - Don't lose the anticipation of eternity and reward; if you do you will lose motivation for faithfulness.
- ENCOURAGEMENT - Two things to keep in mind.
 - a. Every bit of goodness that God enables us to do is going to have its comparable return in heaven. All good deeds are noted and rewarded.
 - b. Every time you are a blessing to someone else out of faithfulness to Christ, whether you are seen or not, you will inherit a blessing.