



## What Are Heavenly Rewards?

*“See, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me, to repay all according to their deeds.”* (Revelation 22:12, NLT)

If you have ever watched the Olympic Rewards Ceremony, you participated in the thrill of watching a gold winner march to the platform while their national anthem played in the background. You heard the crowds clap as someone draped a gold medal around his/her neck. That reward represented years of self-discipline, training and purpose. Their goal, “win the gold”, motivated his/her daily actions for years.

### ***Rewarding believers***

Did you know there is a rewards ceremony (a time of judging and giving rewards for something good done) in your future? Jesus said, *“For I, the Son of Man, will come in the glory of my Father with his angels and will judge all people according to their deeds.”* (Matthew 16:27, NLT) Deeds are something you do. Does this mean that God is keeping track of what you do for him every day? Absolutely! He never overlooks anything. He will reward you openly for every obedient act. He told his disciples, *“If anyone gives you even a cup of water because you belong to the Messiah, I assure you, that person will be rewarded.* (Mark 9:41, NLT) Not only is Jesus eager to reward you, but he will do everything possible to help you store up rewards. When Jesus comes, he will judge you according to what you do in the short time you are on earth. Every action you take now will affect your future forever! Think about that!

To open the eyes of the disciples to how awesome these rewards will be, Jesus told them how to act when hated, excluded and mocked for being a Christian. He said, *“When that happens, rejoice! Yes, leap for joy! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.”* (Luke 6:23, NLT) Can you imagine “leaping for joy” when persecuted? Why would anyone do that? Jesus explains, “Because the ‘great reward’ you will receive for your persecution will be so much greater than your present suffering! Amazing!

### ***Defining rewards***

Don’t be confused. Rewards have nothing to do with where you spend eternity. Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior determines that. All believers go to heaven but not all get the same benefits. Rewards, based on your earthly behavior now, determine what you will be doing in heaven – the honor and places of responsibility you will have for eternity. Compare 80 plus years on earth with eternity!

## **Determining rewards**

In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul compares the church with a building. The foundation is Jesus Christ. Speaking primarily to preachers and teachers, he tells them that everything they teach builds on that foundation. If they teach the truth, it is like building with gold, silver and jewels. If they teach things that are not the truth, it is like building with sticks, hay or even straw! He warns them that there will be a time of testing on Judgment Day to see what kind of material they used. Paul uses the example of “fire” to test the material. Jesus will put their work through fire to see whether it keeps its value. Some will burn up; some will last. If the work survives, they will receive a reward. If not, they will have great loss.

You can also compare your life to a building. Jesus is your foundation. All through your life, you will build on this foundation. When you stand before Jesus on Judgment Day, he will test your deeds or works to see if they have value. Did you build with “gold, silver or jewels” or with “sticks, hay or straw”? Jesus will reward you for the good deeds. *“We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies.”* (2 Corinthians 5:10b, NLT)

What standards will Jesus use when he judges whether something is good or evil? Bruce Wilkerson in *A Life God Rewards* gives three standards God will use.<sup>1</sup>

- **What is your relationship to Jesus?** Jesus makes it very plain that as the branch stays attached to the vine in order to produce fruit, so you must remain close to him. He said, *“For apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15:5b, NLT) Even though you are a Christian, it is possible to continue doing things by your own self-effort rather than trusting Jesus to live his life through you. The Apostle Paul said, *“I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20, NLT) How faithful are you to read God’s Word so that the Spirit of Jesus can guide and empower you to do the deeds he wants you to do?
- **What is your motive?** Jesus said, *“Take care! Don’t do your good deeds publicly to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:1 NLT) What is the right motive? Do everything to honor and please Jesus because you love and want to serve him! You are a spiritual being with a physical body. Everything you do, even eating, studying or playing a sport, can be spiritual. Spiritual actions are not just going to church or reading your Bible. Paul said, *“Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and the Master you are serving is Christ.”* (Colossians 3:23-24, NLT) Ask yourself, “Why am I doing this? Is it so I’ll look good to my peers or because I want to obey and serve my Master? Am I doing this through self-effort or through the power of the Spirit?”

- **Are you doing this deed out of love?** The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that even if they could have faith to move mountains, speak in any language, prophesy and give everything to the poor, but did not love others they would only be making meaningless noises like a loud gong or clanging cymbal! (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) WOW! Jesus said, “*Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children for the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked.*” (Luke 6:35, NLT) Check your love attitude!

### ***Winning the gold***

Jesus came to serve others and to give his life for many. He calls you to do the same. Can you imagine that day when you will stand on the judgment seat before him? What joy it will be to hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” There may be tears for missed opportunities or for doing something with the wrong motive or without love. The Bible says Jesus will wipe away the tears. (Revelation 21:4) What love!

Like the Olympic winner, why not set your heart and mind to “win the gold”? Trust the Lord to guide and direct you so that every day counts!

#### **Attitude Check:**

- How has your attitude toward what you do on earth changed?

#### **Explore:**

- Read, “The Value of Our Work on Earth Will Be Tested” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15) and “Accountability” (in front of the *Student New Testament.*) Write in your journal daily actions you will take to “win the gold.”

#### **Talking with God:**

- Father, help me honor and serve you in all of my actions.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Life God Rewards* by Bruce Wilkinson with David Kopp, Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2002, pp. 53, 54