

Useful Pride

Have you ever wanted to do great things for God or be profoundly used of God? Are such aspirations merely your pride speaking, or is it OK to have ambitions with regard to Christ? If God promises that we have been gifted by his Spirit to edify the saints,¹ then how could it be wrong to strive to be used for that purpose? The fact is, each of us has been given something with which to serve the Body of Christ and the world. Everything God makes and everything God gives is *useful* in his economy. So it seems to me that wanting to be useful to God is a godly mindset, and it should be worthy of our praise and admiration. Paul writes,

Don't you know that on a race track all are running, but one receives the reward? In just that way, run to lay hold of *a reward* for yourself. Moreover, all *the runners* are agonizing, self-controlled. They do it so that they might lay hold of a perishable crown, but we *do it to lay hold of an imperishable crown*. Therefore, I do not run as though uncommitted.

Likewise, I do not box as though beating the air. Rather, I pummel my body and compel it to serve me, or else one way or another, having preached to others, I myself might finish unacceptably. 1 Cor 9:24-27 (*a literal and expanded translation*)

Notice that in both analogies, running and boxing, Paul describes striving with personal effort, training himself with passion, intent, and confidence. The Christian life isn't a passive event. Maturity doesn't just happen. It takes work. In verse 27, Paul speaks of the possibility that he might finish in an unacceptable manner. He's not saying that he could lose his salvation if he fails. He's suggesting that if he somehow lacks self-control, then sin might taint his efforts, causing him to stumble off the track or be knocked down. When we do stumble or fall down, we need help to get back on the track. James speaks of a believer stumbling through sin, and being restored to grace by his brother.² We are to love one another as Christ loved us: exemplifying, encouraging, teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2Ti 3:16). Clearly, if we are to be useful to one another, it requires not only our individual effort, but a community effort as well. To be able to help one another and to spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), we need to prepare ourselves for it.³ Then, as God gives opportunity, we will be ready to do good to all men, but especially to the saints (Gal 6:10). In the process, we become

¹ **Rom 12:4-8** Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. **1 Cor 12:4-11** There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. **Eph 4:15-16** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. NIV

² **James 5:19-20** My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. **1 Peter 4:8-10** Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. NIV

³ **2 Tim 2:20-21** In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. **2 Tim 4:2** Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. NIV

useful servants. Knowing this is true, we need to order our lives in such a way as to lay hold of the prize. We need to get equipped for the struggle ahead, building upon the foundation of Christ. Some of the things we do on the way will be worthwhile; they might even merit praise and a reward. But some will not. Either way, our preparation will be costly:

For no one can lay another foundation besides the one being laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now whoever builds on the foundation (*whether* of gold, silver, precious stones – wood, hay, straw) each one's work will become obvious, for the day will expose it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. Whoever's work remains that was built upon *the foundation* will receive a reward. Whoever's work will have burned will be damaged, but he himself will be saved, yet as through a fire. 1Co 3:11-15 (*literal*)

What is our single biggest obstacle to success in this endeavor? *Sin*. We are called to be holy and consecrated vessels.⁴ But when we sin we become "unclean." We are thereby rendered useless in the service of God.⁵ That's true whether we are proclaiming the Gospel⁶ or building up the Body.⁷ Moreover, sin causes God's name to be blasphemed among the nations (Rom 2:24; Isa 52:5; Ezek 36:22). It also undermines our usefulness as his ambassadors.⁸ When we sin, God will not speak through us because we have become profaned vessels. That doesn't mean we've thwarted his will, or that he can't achieve his purposes using the very consequences caused by our sin. And it certainly doesn't mean that we will remain profaned. But when we sin, we do not stand in the shoes of Christ; we do not speak with his authority; and we do not wield his power against the forces of darkness. We have ceased for the moment to be light, salt, and leaven in the world. If salt should lose its saltiness, of what use is it? (Mt. 5:13-16, 33) Wanting to be useful, and striving for a reward, can therefore be strong motivations for us not to sin.

⁴ **1 Cor 3:16-17** Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. **1 Peter 1:15-16** But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." **1 Peter 1:22** Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. **Heb 12:14** Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. NIV

⁵ **Lev 10:10** You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, **Isa 6:5** "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." **Isa 35:8** And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. **Isa 64:6** All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. NIV

⁶ **2 Peter 2:1-2** But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. **1 Tim 6:1-2** All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them. NIV

⁷ **Eph 4:17-25** Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. **ESV Col 2:6-14** Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **ESV**

⁸ **2 Cor 5:20-21** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **2 Cor 6:3** We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. NIV

As harmful and debilitating as sin is, we nonetheless seem to discount its effect within the Church. But the world doesn't discount our sin. It will condemn us for it even if we won't. In the eyes of the world, a believer's sin makes a lie of his profession of faith. To the world, our brazen and unrepentant sin denies the power of the Holy Spirit. To non-believers, it denies that God can overcome sin and therefore it denies the Gospel itself. Indeed, our sin justifies the world's charge that we are hypocrites and that we misrepresent the truth. That's why, if we sincerely want to be used of God, we must sincerely commit to godliness by the power of the Spirit.

But when we do make such a commitment, another believer may accuse us of being legalistic, prideful, self-righteous, holier-than-thou, etc. Ironically, they do so with an air of spiritual superiority. Perhaps you've heard of "crabbing." Crabbing is when one crab tries to climb out of a bucket to find its freedom, only to have another crab in the bucket drag it back into its own bondage. We're funny creatures, you know. We need constant affirmation that what we are doing is socially correct or acceptable, that everyone else is just like us. So if a believer strives to be godly, other believers sometimes compare themselves to him. Out of frustration or guilt over their own efforts, they accuse him of having impure motives.⁹ We need to gently turn a deaf ear to those detractors who always seem to find fault with others. *Nonetheless, we should take such accusations seriously.* We do need to check our motives to be sure they're pure.¹⁰ We need to be honest with ourselves and seek godly counsel. But if we are convinced that we are not doing it for selfish gain,¹¹ then we must continue to do what is right, seeking ways to serve.

I'm only saying that the same attitude which condemns godliness under the guise of upholding grace¹² condemns ambition under the guise of advocating humility.¹³ Humility (or meekness) is never required at the expense of doing our duty. James tells us that if we know what we ought to do and we don't do it – whether out of fear, laziness, or a false sense of humility – then for us it is *sin* (Jm 4:17).

⁹ **Matt 7:3-5** "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. **John 7:24** Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." **2 Cor 10:12-18** We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory. But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. **Gal 6:3-5** For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. ESV

¹⁰ **1 Peter 2:16** Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. **1 Cor 8:9** Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. **Gal 5:13** You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. NIV

¹¹ **1 Peter 5:1-3** So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ESV

¹² **Rom 6:1-2** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? NIV

¹³ **Col 2:18** Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. **Col 2:23** Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their will-worship [KJV], their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. NIV

How then do we check our motives? We are commanded neither to think too highly nor too lowly of ourselves. Rather, we are to exercise sober judgment (Rom 12:3). In other words, we are called upon to make an objective assessment of ourselves. We are to fairly determine what we have been given by God to offer to the community of believers in the service of Christ. Paul is asking us to *consider* how we might be useful to the Body of Christ.¹⁴ We are to do so according to the grace that God has given us (i.e. having the faith or confidence that God will enable us to overcome our fears, inhibitions, and inadequacies). We are to use the giftedness that has been allocated or distributed to us by the Spirit for the purpose of building up the saints and evangelizing the lost. No one in the Church is empty-handed in this regard. Each of us has been given both grace and graces. Each of us has the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). And if we have the Spirit of Christ then we also have his power to be made useful for his purposes. That is, God has some useful purpose in mind for every one of us, and he will both equip and employ us to those ends. We, however, need to be diligent in identifying and pursuing those ends by allowing ourselves to be properly equipped by the Church. Even Paul was equipped by the Church, beginning with a three-year stint in Arabia.¹⁵ Yet, though being equipped, he continued his education in Christ, writing:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to [realize] the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already [realized]. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. Php 3:10-17 NIV (modified)

Paul was driven, motivated, enthusiastic, and studious. He encourages and admonishes Timothy to have this same attitude of being industrious towards sound doctrine and godly practice:

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. 1 Tim 4:6-11 ESV

Here we find an interesting correlation between doctrine and practice. It is the same correlation we find in Romans 12:2. “Do not conform to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, in order for you to prove what *is* good and acceptable and perfect: the will of God.” Again, the burden is on us to ensure that our minds are renewed by the truth, and the truth reveals to us the will of God. That way we are able to determine those things which are good, acceptable, and perfect in God’s sight, and then *do* them.¹⁶ To put it another way, God’s word instills in us a

¹⁴ Rom 12:4-8 (see footnote 1)

¹⁵ Gal 1:15-18

¹⁶ Isa 30:21 And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” ESV

conscience, the knowledge of right and wrong, so that we may choose the better of two paths. God's Spirit illumines Scripture so we may understand that knowledge correctly; but the Spirit won't force us to open the bible and read it. That's a *choice* we make. Yet, the bible can still be confusing, boring, or difficult for us. Here we have another choice to make. We can give up reading and studying because the effort tires us, or we can strive forward, making the effort and pressing for the prize. The prize at this point is the renewal of our minds. Why is that important? So that we will be able to discern what is good. Why? So that we can do what is good. Why? So that we can be of use to God. And how may we be of use? By proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ; by baptizing, discipling, and teaching the nations to obey all that he has commanded. And to do these things, we need to know the word of God. We need to practice handling it correctly, and then we need to consistently apply its truth to the way we live.

Strive quickly to show yourself acceptable to God, a workman who has no cause for shame, cutting straight the word of truth. 2Tim 2:15 (literal)

We can take charge of our training regimen. We can discipline ourselves. We can stop being so fearful of being called legalistic that we become antinomian, abandoning the law and our own obedience. There is an acceptable standard of *teaching* to which we all subscribe and are bound. There is an acceptable standard of *behavior* to which we all subscribe and are bound.¹⁷ These two things, doctrine and practice, truth and works, are inseparably linked. In all of this, we are to be watchful, diligent, industrious, and yes, we are to be *ambitious* for the cause of Christ. The writer of Hebrews says exactly that. He pushes and exhorts us to work hard, and to desire to get past the milk of salvation and move on to the meat of obedience, the meat which marks maturity in Christ and which flows from the word of God:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for

¹⁷ **Rom 6:17-18** But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. **ESV Rom 16:17** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. **ESV Eph 4:14** Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. **1 Tim 1:8-11** We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers-and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. **1 Tim 4:6-16** If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. **1 Tim 6:3-6** If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. **2 Tim 3:16-17** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. **2 Tim 4:3-5** For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. **NIV Titus 2:7-8** Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. **ESV 2 John 1:10-11** If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. **NIV**

those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Heb 5:12-14 ESV

In the *Parable of the Talents* (Mt 25:14-30), there is a servant who has been entrusted with something of great value,¹⁸ something which he is to employ to benefit his master and to enlarge his master's resources. But this servant is afraid to put it at risk; he is afraid to use it or develop it into something more than what he had been given at first. He had potential in his hands, but by unbelief he has left it buried, sitting idle, where it is of no use to anyone. And what was said of this servant by his master? "You wicked and slothful servant!" This servant knew what his master was like, what his methods and expectations were – and yet he ignored all of that out of fear that he might not be successful, that he might not be effective, that he might not rightly handle what had been entrusted to him. Instead of finding understanding and acceptance in his master's sight, he is severely rebuked for abandoning his duty and responsibility, for failing to be confident enough or ambitious enough to do even the minimum with what he had been given. Understand that his master had not given him more than he could handle; nor does God give us more than we can handle. Rather, he allocated resources to each servant according to that servant's own abilities (v 15). In the same way, the Spirit allocates to each of us our giftedness according to our grace.¹⁹ These are precious gifts, carefully selected for us by our Father in heaven. We may rightly feel blessed and proud to have what he has given to us, without feeling either superior or inferior about it.²⁰ Nor should we envy what he has given to another.²¹

We can take pride in ourselves because we are God's workmanship (Eph 2:10). We can take pride in the Body of Christ, because together we are his Bride, kept pure for him (2Co 11:2). We can take pride in the Gospel, because it is the means of salvation for all who believe (1Co 1:18). We can take pride in God, because he is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble (Ps 46:1). We can take pride in the Holy Spirit who abides in us for our aid and for the glory of Christ (Jn 16:13-15). We are not to quench or grieve his Spirit by our own laziness or indifference toward truth and sin (1Th 5:19; Eph 4:30).

We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of the One who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1Pe 2:9 ESV (modified)

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Mt 9:37-38 ESV

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Lk 9:62 ESV

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "*So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, just the flesh is weak.*" Mt 26:40-41 ESV (modified)

¹⁸ A talent of gold would be about 200 pounds of gold, 6000 denarii, or roughly \$600,000 in today's U.S. currency.

¹⁹ **Rom 12:6** We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. **1 Cor 12:11** All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. NIV

²⁰ **Rom 12:3** For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. **1 Cor 4:7** For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? NIV

²¹ **1 Cor 1:7-8** Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. NIV

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Php 2:12-13 ESV

Thus we see that the responsibility rests completely on us, but our capability rests completely on Christ.²² We have choice, and freedom, and gifts – but apart from Christ we can do nothing with them (Jn 15:5). Keeping in mind who we serve and where our help comes from, we make every effort to do what is right in his sight, to rest in his peace, to draw strength from his well, and to proclaim his glory in all we do. We are ambassadors of the Lord Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let’s keep that in mind, always striving to be worthy servants and faithful friends. It is not prideful or unwarranted to strive for the same accolades that were given to the two dutiful servants in the *Parable of the Talents*:

‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’ Mt 25:21

Look forward in time. Think about the day we will enter into God’s final rest. What will we do with the crowns for which we have striven so hard, and for which we have poured out our life like a drink offering?²³ We will cast them at the feet of our Lord.²⁴ For our striving will be at an end,²⁵ his glory will be fully revealed,²⁶ and we shall see him face to face forever.²⁷ Praise God!

Now, let’s get to work...

²² **Col 1:29** To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. NIV

²³ Php 2:17; 2Tim 4:6

²⁴ Rev 4:10-11

²⁵ 2Ti 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

²⁶ **Isa 40:5** And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, all flesh shall see it together, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” **Ro 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

²⁷ 1Co 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.