

DRIVEN

REVISED & EXPANDED
10TH ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

BY ETERNITY



*Make your life
count today
and forever*

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Best-selling author of *Good or God?* and *The Bait of Satan*

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THE ETERNAL

Teach us to make the most of our time . . . and make our efforts successful. Yes, make our efforts successful!

—Psalm 90:12, 17 NLT

Most people want to live a life that counts. This is a right and godly aspiration. It was Moses's request in the above prayer. He began by asking for wisdom to make the most of time. Many things lost in life can be restored; however, time misused can never be recovered. Once the sun goes down, the day is forever gone.

Moses's prayer concludes with, "Make our efforts successful." The exact phrase is repeated. Why? Moses didn't have a problem with grammar or memory. Rather, this represents a literary style found in Hebrew writing. The repetition is a form of emphasis. In English, when we want to emphasize the importance of a word or phrase, we have several methods available. We can make it bold, italicize it, underscore it, use all capital letters, or add an exclamation point for emphasis. These are all ways of calling the reader's attention to something that is very important. However, the Hebrew writers would write a word or phrase twice to bring emphasis, and they weren't known to overstate—they were always careful with their words. The fact that this phrase was repeated twice in Scripture shows not only that success is God's will for us, but also that He is passionate about it. He is the one who has placed emphasis on it.

We were created to enjoy success. God wants our lives to be significant! This was God's desire first, not ours. He makes this known throughout Scripture. Let me list just two such occurrences. The first:

“The Lord your God will then make you *successful* in everything you do” (Deuteronomy 30:9 NLT). Notice the word *everything*, not *some things*!

Again we read: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way *prosperous*, and then you will have *good success*” (Joshua 1:8).

It takes godly wisdom to enjoy success. Scripture states, “He who loves wisdom loves his own best interest and will be a success” (Proverbs 19:8 TLB). Wisdom gives us the knowledge and ability to make right choices at the opportune time. Wisdom is not just for the mentally sharp; it is for all who fear the Lord and are found in Christ. If your aim is to build a life of eternal significance, you must do it through godly wisdom—and that is what this message is all about.

Wisdom breeds success, which brings enduring satisfaction and rewards: “If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you” (Proverbs 9:12 NIV). Not only does the Lord desire your success, but He also longs to reward you for it. Again we read, “Day by day the Lord observes the good deeds done by godly men, and gives them eternal rewards” (Psalm 37:18 TLB).

The fact that God desires us to succeed has been emphasized in a good segment of the church in recent years, as it should be. However, many times success is perceived the way society defines it rather than the way God views it. It’s seen through the eyes of the temporal rather than the eternal. This blurs our vision and understanding, which results in misguided pursuits.

We will all one day stand before the Judge of the universe, Jesus Christ. If we’ve made our lives count through godly wisdom, we will be rewarded eternally. If we’ve been misguided in our affairs, we will either be punished or suffer eternal loss. So it’s wise to spend a few hours searching out what He is looking for.

That is the focus of this book: making your life count not only today but throughout eternity. The Bible is clear about how to do this. If we

are to be motivated by the eternal, let's start off by getting an understanding of it.

Eternity

Read carefully these two scriptures:

“No one can begin to understand eternity.” (Job 36:26 TLB)

. . . He has put eternity in their hearts. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Eternity. What is it? How can it be defined? How can it be understood? One dictionary defines it as *infinite time*¹; yet another as *the state of existing outside of time*.² How can one dictionary define eternity as existing within the state of time while another defines it as being outside time? And why has this gone unquestioned? Wouldn't we question one of two science books if they defined something in our world as existing in different states? Suppose one book defined a fish to be a vertebrate living in water while another reports they live in environments free of water. We would immediately conclude that one was wrong and throw it out. So why do we not question and throw out one of the dictionaries' definitions of eternity?

The truth is that eternity cannot be mentally comprehended. Our minds are finite, prohibited from grasping perpetual or everlasting concepts.

Allow me to illustrate. Take a moment and imagine where the end of the universe is. Think of its outer limits. If you can, then what do you find at the external boundary? A wall? What's it made of? How thick is it? Would the outer side of the wall be the exact point of the end of the universe? If so, what is beyond the outside of the wall? More space? Wouldn't this constitute a continuation of the universe? Where is the end? Can your mind take in the endlessness of the universe? Just stop and think about it.

Or what about a bottomless pit? Can you imagine falling into a hole in which you never stopped falling? You would never hit or even see the floor. You just keep falling and falling forever. Two things, not just one, short-circuit our mental reasoning here: first, that there is no bottom to the hole; second, that we experience an endless time of falling. It's hard to comprehend, and it sounds like a concept from science fiction, yet such a place is referenced seven times in Scripture.

What about God Himself, man's Creator? Pause a moment and think of His beginning—or, I should say, non-beginning. Scripture declares that He is “from everlasting to everlasting.” If He wasn't born—if no one created Him—then how did He begin to be who He is? How did He evolve?

The truth is He didn't evolve into God, for the psalmist declares, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2). Meditate on this a while. If you do, you'll frustrate your intellectual reasoning since, as the book of Job says, “No one can begin to understand eternity.”

Placed in Our Hearts

What is in truth declared unreachable to our natural minds is placed in our hearts by the Creator. Eternity is known in our hearts. It is born in every human being. This is why “the fool has said in his *heart*, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1). Notice Scripture does *not* say, “The fool has said in his *mind*.” There are many atheists who emphatically deny the existence of God, but in their hearts they know He exists, for eternity is planted there. They've not yet hardened their hearts to a completely degenerated state.

I had a friend who, years ago, was a staunch atheist—or so he thought. He wouldn't allow anyone to witness to him. In fact, one day he ripped a Bible from the hands of a coworker, threw it on the ground, and stomped

on it, cursing the man and his Bible. He accused this Christian man of being weak and brainless.

Later, after years of confessed atheism, the man suffered severe chest pains. Doctors opened him up for exploratory surgery. They immediately closed him up and told him he had less than twenty-four hours to live.

While he lay on the bed that night, he realized he was going to his eternal abode and it was not at all where he wanted to end up. How did he know that, since he would not allow anyone to share the Scriptures with him? Could it be he had eternity planted in his heart? Just as Scripture states of all mankind, “For the truth about God is known to them instinctively; God has put this knowledge in their hearts” (Romans 1:19 TLB).

That night my friend’s heart stopped. He left his body and descended into deep darkness. The darkness was so thick he felt he was wearing it; not a glimmer of light could be seen. After falling for what seemed to be quite some time, he heard the horrifying screams of tormented souls. He was pulled by a strong force right up to the gates of hell when suddenly he was able to retreat back to his body. He had been revived.

The next morning he called for the only Christian man he knew. His friend came and proclaimed the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Once the man had received Jesus Christ into his life as Lord and Savior, his friend prayed for his healing. Three weeks later he walked out of the hospital. He lived decades more before he passed on to his eternal reward. He was a walking miracle.

As an atheist, this man proclaimed there was no God, yet eternity was planted in his heart. The fool, on the other hand, is the one who has not just denied God mentally but has also resisted in his heart to the point of a seared conscience. He is beyond reach. It’s one thing to hold firm to a belief in your intellect. That can be changed. But it is quite another thing to completely harden your heart. *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* gives this definition: “In Scripture the ‘fool’ primarily is the person who casts off the fear of God and thinks and acts as if he could safely disregard the eternal principles of God’s righteousness.”³

A fool may actually acknowledge God mentally, but he denies His existence in his heart, which is reflected in how he lives. The fear of God is what keeps our hearts within reach of the Holy Spirit. If it is lost, there is no hope left for us. Paul said, “Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who *fear God*, to you the word of this salvation has been sent” (Acts 13:26). Only those who fear God are capable of hearing the words of eternal life.

Eternity Defined

Eternity has been planted in our hearts, even though it’s impossible to comprehend it with our minds. So in defining it, I ask you to listen with your heart. In fact, the same is necessary for you to benefit from this entire book. How do you do this? First of all, acknowledge your need for the Holy Spirit to help you, and ask for His assistance. He will commune with your innermost man, not your head. Second, stop to ponder and meditate when your heart is stirred or gripped by a statement of truth. Don’t race through this book; if you do, the benefit will be limited.

To receive the full impact of God’s eternal word to you, apply these two steps and you will be changed forever. David says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). Don’t just read for mental understanding, which can be easily forgotten or lost, but let God’s Word be hidden in your heart through contemplation and prayer.

Eternity is everlasting; there is no end to it. However, it’s not just a matter of ceaseless time, as it is not subject to time. Eternity transcends time. To speak of eternity merely in terms of perpetual duration is to miss the full picture.

To capture the best view of eternity, we must look at God Himself. He is not limited in power, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, or glory—just to name a few. He is self-existent; forever He was and forever He will be God. He is called the “Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6).

Young's literal translation of that phrase reads "Father of Eternity."⁴ He is called the "King of eternity" (1 Timothy 1:17 AMP). All that is eternal is found in Him; in fact, eternity itself is found in Him. All that is outside of Him is temporal and will change. No matter how good, noble, powerful, or enduring it may seem, it will eventually cease. Even the earth and universe will change, but He will not:

Lord, in the beginning you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. Even they will perish, but you remain forever. They will wear out like old clothing. You will roll them up like an old coat. They will fade away like old clothing. But you are always the same; you will never grow old. (Hebrews 1:10–12 NLT)

Not only will He never cease, but He remains eternally the same. Scripture declares:

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:24–25)

God is eternal; therefore, what He speaks is eternal. He cannot lie, nor can what He says be broken. If it weren't so, then all would collapse into utter darkness, for He is light and upholds all things by His Word. There can never be a change to what He says, or else He would no longer be eternal. That is a sure foundation upon which we can build our lives.

Eternal Judgments

Many today are not building their lives on the eternal (God's Word) but rather on cultural thinking, tradition, assumptions, and feelings about

who God is. This doesn't just apply to people who are not Christians but to many believers as well. It's a scary thing to believe that something temporal is eternal truth. If a person does this, their foundation is faulty. They are setting themselves up for a sure fall. They believe a lie and are in a deceived state.

I am amazed at how many people I meet who base their lives on what's not eternal. Some will tell me of God and their belief in His Son, but the One they declare just isn't the One revealed in His Word. The deception runs deep. How can they believe what they have simply imagined within their own minds, ideas shaped by a society that has already been declared to operate contrary to God's nature? Jesus said:

He who . . . does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. (John 12:48–49)

There is a Judgment Day, which has been appointed from the foundation of the world (see Acts 17:31). That day will not bring new revelations of truth; rather, it will measure all things by what has already been spoken. God's Word, which we currently possess, will judge us in that last day. It is eternal. It is final. There are no exceptions, alterations, or revisions. Wouldn't it benefit us to know and live by what He says—rather than make assumptions about what He said?

The judgments to be made that day are called *eternal* (see Hebrews 6:2). In other words, the decisions made that day—which will be based on how we aligned our lives with God's eternal Word—will determine how we spend the rest of eternity! There will never be any changes to those decisions, for they are *eternal judgments*.

So many, both believers and nonbelievers, are ignorantly allowing the appointed judgment to hasten toward them without investigation.

They've taken false hope in concepts that are not found in the Bible. Some think God will take into account all the good they've done, and if it outweighs the bad, they will find favor. Others who profess a new birth experience have thought they will not stand before Jesus as Judge because He is their Savior. They believe they are exempt from any form of judgment. They will be most surprised. Then there are some who think everything will just pan out. They are trusting in an unscriptural mercy.

None of these concepts are what the New Testament reveals and teaches. These notions and many others that people have devised in their own imaginations are temporal and will not stand in that day. There will be stunned men and women, and I personally think there will be more professing Christians than unbelievers who are shocked on Judgment Day.

Confidence at the Judgment

We don't have to go to the Judgment Day in fear. We can go with confidence:

And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world. (1 John 4:17 NLT)

Notice the words "as we live in God, our love grows more perfect." The key that will give us confidence on Judgment Day is the love of God being made perfect (or mature) in us.

Now, here is where many in the church falter. They see the love of God in the light of the temporal, not the eternal. There is an understanding of love and goodness that is admired by society and many in the church, but it is determined by human measures. These concepts are actually contrary to the love of God. Let me illustrate a few such occurrences that are common.

"We love each other so much and are planning to get married." This

is often stated when two people are having sex outside of marriage. Not only is this sinful even if they do follow through and get married, but many times I've witnessed that those who make such statements end up not getting married. They've forgotten the clear exhortation, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4 NIV). Notice the writer of Hebrews does not say, "The adulterer and sexually immoral who don't attend church." No, it is all who practice this lifestyle.

"I know it wasn't quite the truth, but it will help close the deal, and we will make sure they get fair treatment." Businesspeople often say this when they want to secure a sale they really believe is good for the customer but they need to twist the facts a little to get them to move forward. Not only is this the sin of lying, but the deal is almost always better for the one making the statement. Have they forgotten the warning that states, "All liars (those who knowingly convey untruth by word or deed)—[all of these shall have] their part in the lake that blazes with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8 AMP)?

"What I said about him is the truth." This is often said when people are talking in a negative light (gossiping or slandering) about a fellow worker, friend, boss, etc. The fact is, you can be 100 percent right and still be wrong according to eternal standards. If you recall, Noah's youngest son, Ham, reported his father's nakedness and drunken state accurately to his brothers. However, as a result of his dishonoring his father, a curse came on his lineage that lasted generations. Have those who gossip and slander forgotten the exhortation to believers that states, "Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door" (James 5:9 NLT)?

The examples are endless, but the common denominator is that they are contrary to God's eternal will. The scary fact is that many who live in this manner and make such seemingly harmless statements may attend

church, be very kind in their mannerisms, and be looked upon as model citizens. But how do they measure up to the eternal?

John gave the answer to perfecting (maturing) the love of God earlier in his letter:

Whoever says, I know Him [I perceive, recognize, understand, and am acquainted with Him (Jesus Christ)] but fails to keep and obey His commandments (teachings) is a liar, and the Truth [of the Gospel] is not in him. But he who keeps (treasures) His Word [who bears in mind His precepts, who observes His message in its entirety], truly in him has the love of and for God been perfected . . . (1 John 2:4–5 AMP)

Recall that it is the perfected (matured) love of God that gives us confidence to stand before our Judge. John makes it clear that the love of God is perfected in keeping His commandments, not in behaving in a way that is good in society's eyes. Keep in mind that Eve was not drawn to the *evil* side of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; rather, she was enticed by the *good* side! "The woman saw how *beautiful* the tree was and how *good* its fruit would be to eat" (Genesis 3:6 TEV). Human reasoning can create a form of beauty and goodness that is contrary to the eternal love of God.

Scripture also states that we cannot observe a percentage of God's commands and believe that we will have confidence on Judgment Day. It is when we carefully observe all of His Word in its entirety that the love of God is matured. This is why God gives us grace: it empowers us to obey His Word completely, in a way that is acceptable to Him. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably" (Hebrews 12:28).

The key is to know what the King desires and looks for, not what seems good to society or human reasoning. For this reason God tells us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable

and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). What may seem good to our culture may be an affront to God’s desires—the eternal.

Allow me to illustrate. I’m currently sitting in a hotel in Singapore, where I’ll be preaching to close to twenty thousand people this weekend. I’ve been to this great nation many times. I’ve also preached the gospel in the Netherlands a few times. In the Netherlands, it is not against the law to have marijuana in your possession. The people there can smoke it legally and not fear penalty. However, in Singapore if you are caught with a certain amount of drugs (and it is a small amount), you will be arrested and severely punished. If caught with certain drugs, the punishment is death by hanging! When you fly into Singapore, this policy is written right on the entry card: “Death to Drug Traffickers under Singapore Law.”

Now, can you imagine a young Dutchman who regularly smokes marijuana traveling to Singapore and sharing his pot with Singaporeans? He gladly states to his new friends, “Hey guys, this stuff is great. It calms you, gives you an enjoyable buzz, and takes your frustrations away. Would you like some? I’d love to share it with you.”

The young man is immediately arrested. He’s in shock. The first question out of his mouth to the police officers is, “Why are you arresting me?”

Judgment day arrives. The Dutchman stands in the court before the judge, believing with all his heart this is some kind of fluke. The judge pronounces his guilt and punishment.

The man, in shock, says, “Your honor, where I come from it’s fine to share marijuana with your friends.”

The judge then says, “You’re not in Holland. You’re in Singapore, and in this nation, it is against the law!”

The Dutchman’s confidence is gone; he has nothing to stand on. There is no recourse. He is standing before the highest court of the land, doomed with no defense.

While I was in Singapore several years back, a young American was arrested for vandalizing an automobile. He was arrested, judged guilty,

and sentenced to several strokes of Rotan. This is a punishment that inflicts permanent physical damage by whipping a person on the hind side with a type of bamboo plant treated with chemicals. The verdict seemed extreme. Even the president of the United States tried to get the young man's sentence lightened. However, he had no success. The young man broke the laws of Singapore and had to serve his sentence.

All of us will stand before the highest court of the universe. This court's decision will be *eternally* final. Many will be shocked by the verdict about their lives, but they don't have to be. You don't have to be.

Are you ready? According to the Word of God, we can go before the Judge of the universe with confidence. This book is designed to help you prepare. If that young Dutchman would have taken time to learn and prepare to enter Singapore, he would have avoided severe penalty. How much more important is it for us to prepare for our own judgment, for the decisions that are made at the Judgment Seat will be forever.

Rewards

There will be more than one judgment in eternity. There will be one for unbelievers, another for believers, and even one for angels. The decisions made will vary. There will be loss and punishment, and there will be rewards. We'll go into this in depth in upcoming chapters, but let me point out again that the decisions made will be eternal. This cannot be overemphasized; try again to mentally grasp never ending! It is God's will that we know this in advance and that we labor for the rewards that come from adhering to His Word. Paul says:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but [only] one receives the prize? So run [your race] that you may lay hold [of the prize] and make it yours. Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately and restricts himself in all things. They do it to win a wreath that will soon wither, but we [do it to

receive a crown of eternal blessedness] that cannot wither. Therefore I do not run uncertainly (without definite aim). I do not box like one beating the air and striking without an adversary. But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it . . . (1 Corinthians 9:24–27 AMP)

Paul clearly says, “I do not run uncertainly (without definite aim).” Another version says it like this: “So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step” (verse 26 NLT). That is exactly what every human being should do—run with certainty and purpose to win. We are not competing against others, only ourselves.

Driven by Eternity

Just thinking everything will pan out for good at the Judgment Seat is not enough. We have no excuse, for God has made His will available to us. There will be scores of people at the judgment who believe they’ve done well in comparison to those around them, yet they will not have allowed the eternal to direct and fuel their lives. Hence the title of this book: *Driven by Eternity*.

The word *driven* means “to propel.” It also means to “guide, control, or direct.” Another definition is “to supply the motive force to.” What is guiding and motivating our lives on this earth? Is it the eternal or is it the temporal? Is it based on divine wisdom? Or are we comparing ourselves with others? Have we listened to flattery, tradition, or myths proclaimed in certain pulpits or schools? Will what we’ve built our lives upon stand before God at the Judgment Seat, or will our efforts be forever lost? Remember, we already know what will be the standard at our judgment: “The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

Many professing Christians will be shocked when they stand before Jesus Christ at the judgment. They will be those who took security in a

part of what the New Testament teaches but neglected to carefully search out the entire picture. My question to you is this: do you want to find out the truth after the *eternal* decision has already been made and it's too late to change, or do you want to know now the standard by which you will be judged?

The next chapter will open with an allegory that will continue into the following chapter. Read it carefully and remember the details, for we will refer back to it often. The story will then conclude in chapter eight, and the truths it contains will be discussed through the rest of the book. This book revolves around this allegory, so please don't skim it. You may also want to refer back to it as the teaching progresses.

God has dealt with me personally about most of what is shared in this book. I will share many of my own faults, which have been scrutinized by the Holy Spirit under the microscope of His truth. My hope is that this will stir you to carefully search the Scriptures, that you may have a firm foundation to stand upon on Judgment Day. I will share some of the greatest misconceptions in our society that cause men and women to grow further from the One they profess as Savior. You will be shocked, shaken, and chastened at times, but it will all be followed by promise, hope, and comfort.

If you are courageous, desire the truth, and have a heart for God, then let's proceed. You'll be glad you did! Take to heart the following exhortation:

God's gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this. I want you to put your foot down. Take a firm stand on these matters so that those who have put their trust in God will concentrate on the essentials that are good for everyone. (Titus 3:7–8 The Message)

THE FOUNDATION

*. . . The [uncompromisingly] righteous
have an everlasting foundation.*

—Proverbs 10:25 AMP

Before returning to the allegory of Affabel to discuss the judgments and rewards of Selfish and Charity, we'll put a cap on what we've discussed in the past three chapters. Recall this passage from chapter four:

Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ (the Messiah), advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity. Let us not again be laying the foundation of . . . eternal judgment and punishment. (Hebrews 6:1–2 AMP)

Being without a firm foundation in the truths of eternal judgment and punishment prevents us from building a proper and healthy life in Christ. It could be compared to attempting to advance your education without the basic tools acquired in elementary school, such as the ability to read and write.

Why is this so? In careful study of the gospels, you'll notice that Jesus spoke of and described hell more than He did heaven. He did this to plant a foundation within us—the fear of God. Here's one example:

“Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from

the housetops for all to hear! Dear friends, don't be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill the body; they cannot do any more to you. But I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill people and then throw them into hell." (Luke 12:3–5 NLT)

These words are strong and precise: attaining and maintaining a good understanding of eternal judgment and punishment firmly plants and keeps the fear of the Lord in our hearts.

Allow me to explain. Only God can give the eternal sentence to hell. What we have spoken in secret will be revealed by the light of His glory at the judgment. Not only our words but also our motives, attitudes, actions, and works will be made known. The fear of God keeps us continually aware that nothing can be hidden from Him, even the most secret things. We know nothing will escape His judgment—and His judgment is just. If we lack this understanding, we can become deceived into believing God overlooks or even doesn't see lawlessness, and we will take comfort in an unscriptural mercy that doesn't exist (as Deceived, Faint Heart, and Double Life did). We can easily become among the many in these last days who will drift away from steadfast devotion and into lawlessness.

Those who lack this foundation will surely slip into the fear of man, and we ultimately serve who we fear. If we fear God, we will obey Him even under pressure. If we fear man, we will yield to man—especially under pressure—and drift toward what benefits our own pleasures, fleshly desires, or pride. To consistently yield to the flesh will ultimately lead to serious consequences. So if we lack a conscious understanding of eternal judgment and punishment, we will lack a certain measure of the fear of the Lord, for a holy awe of the judgments of Christ is indeed one aspect of the fear of the Lord. Paul says it like this:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to

what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men . . . (2 Corinthians 5:10–11 NASB)

Paul wasn't referring to the Great White Throne Judgment (the one Jesus referred to in Luke 12), at which people will be sentenced to hell. He was referring to the believer's judgment. We will begin to discuss this judgment in the next chapter, but notice that Paul equates Christ's judgment seat with the fear of the Lord. In fact, in the verse above, he actually calls the Judgment Seat "the fear of the Lord." The point is, you cannot separate the fear of the Lord from an understanding of judgment, and the fear of the Lord is the key to a healthy life.

Hear the words of the prophet Isaiah: "He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure" (Isaiah 33:6 NIV).

Holy fear is the key to God's sure foundation. Recall in the previous chapters Jesus foretelling of the multitude who would do miraculous things in His name but would be turned away to eternal punishment. It's not surprising that, in Matthew 7, Jesus immediately continued by explaining the cause of their downfall. It was their foundation. They built their lives on mindsets and beliefs that couldn't weather life's storms. In Jesus's words:

"So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock [God's sure foundation, the fear of the Lord].

"But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!" (Matthew 7:24–27 TEV)

Those who have endured to the end withstood the storms because of their firm foundation. The fear of the Lord is that foundation; it provides stability for us. It is a storehouse of the riches of God. His salvation, wisdom, and knowledge are all hidden in it.

The Fear of the Lord

What is the fear of the Lord? Is it to be scared of God? Absolutely not. How can we have intimacy with the Lord (which is His earnest desire) if we are afraid of Him? When God came to reveal Himself to Israel, He came to have fellowship with them like He had with Moses—but they all ran back and refused to draw near. Moses told the people, “*Do not fear*; for God has come to test you, and *that His fear may be before you*, so that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20).

Moses’s words sound like they contradict themselves, but they don’t. He differentiates between being afraid of God and the fear of the Lord, and there is a distinction. The one who is afraid of God has something to hide. Recall what Adam did when he disobeyed in the Garden of Eden: he hid from the presence of the Lord. On the other hand, the one who fears God is afraid to be away from Him. He runs from disobedience. So the first definition of holy fear is to be terrified to be away from God.

Let’s continue to unpack what it means. To fear the Lord is to honor, esteem, value, respect, and reverence Him above anything or anyone else. It is to love what He loves and hate what He hates. What is important to Him is important to us; what is not important to Him is not important to us. When we fear Him, we will *tremble at His word*, which means we obey Him instantly—when it doesn’t make sense, when it hurts, when we don’t see the benefits. And we obey to completion. So yes, the manifestation of the fear of the Lord is *obedience* to His Word, ways, or commands.

Scripture tells us the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Or we can say it like this: it’s the *foundation* of wisdom. Wisdom, which we will discuss in great depth in future chapters, is the knowledge and ability to make

the right choices at the opportune time. Those who make wrong choices under pressure lack wisdom, and wisdom's source is the fear of the Lord.

Scripture tells us that our lives can be compared to building houses. First comes the foundation; next we build the structure. We read, "Through wisdom a house is built" (Proverbs 24:3). If we are building our lives with the ability to make right choices, then we will build a healthy life with which we'll be able to stand with confidence before the Judgment Seat. The very beginning or foundation of this wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

Kept from Departing

Christians wouldn't backslide if they had the fear of the Lord firmly planted in their hearts. We wouldn't slip or drift away from our steadfast devotion to Jesus. We wouldn't take His Word for granted or treat it casually. We wouldn't flirt with sin, which causes believers' hearts to harden so that they eventually fall away (see Hebrews 3:12–13). We would always know that what is done and spoken in secret will be proclaimed publicly at the Judgment Seat.

Hear what God said to Jeremiah about New Testament people:

"They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me." (Jeremiah 32:38–40)

Notice God says His people will "*fear Me forever . . . that they will not depart from Me.*" I recall a meeting in Malaysia where the Spirit of the fear of the Lord manifested strongly. People were there from all over the Eastern Hemisphere. Bible school students, pastors, and many others packed the auditorium where I was speaking. Toward the close of the

service, many were weeping uncontrollably and lying all over the floor near the platform.

The terror of the Lord was so awesome in that atmosphere, I thought, *John Bevere, you make one wrong move, say one wrong thing, and you are dead!* Would that have happened? I don't know, but I can say a man and a woman made a wrong move in a similar atmosphere in the New Testament and died. The immediate result of their judgment was that "great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

After this meeting in Malaysia, a couple from India approached me and said, "John, we feel so clean inside."

I responded, "Yes, I do too."

The next morning I was in my hotel room and I found this scripture: "The fear of the Lord is clean, *enduring forever*" (Psalm 19:9).

The Holy Spirit immediately spoke to my heart and said, "Lucifer was the lead worship angel in heaven. He was anointed, beautiful, and blessed. But he didn't fear Me; *he didn't endure forever.*"

I contemplated this. I then heard, "A third of the angels who surrounded My throne and saw My glory didn't fear Me. *They didn't endure forever.*"

I was struck by what God had revealed. Again I heard, "Adam and Eve walked in the presence of My glory. They fellowshiped with Me, but they did not fear Me. *They didn't endure in My presence forever.*"

The fear of the Lord gives us staying power. It keeps us consistently obedient to God's Word. Believers are warned, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us *fear* lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1). It's interesting that the writer of this verse says *fear* instead of *love*. It is the fear of God that keeps us from drifting back into sin.

A Famous Evangelist

I will never forget the time I visited a famous evangelist who was serving his last year of a five-year prison sentence. His case had been made

known to the world and brought much reproach on the kingdom. However, during his first year in prison, he had a genuine encounter with the Lord. When I walked into that facility four years later, one of the first things he said to me was, “John, this prison wasn’t God’s judgment on my life; it was His mercy. If I would have kept going the way I was living, I would have ended up in hell for eternity.”

Now he had my attention. I knew I was speaking to a broken man of God, a true servant of Christ. I knew he started out in ministry very much in love with Jesus. His passion had been evident. I wondered how he ended up so far from the Lord while still at the height of his ministry. So I asked him, “When did you fall out of love with Jesus?”

He looked at me and answered without hesitation, “I didn’t!”

Very puzzled, I replied, “But what about the mail fraud and adultery you committed in the past seven years—everything that you’re in prison for?”

He said, “John, I loved Jesus all the way through it, but I didn’t fear God. He wasn’t the supreme authority of my life.” Then he said something that riveted me: “John, there are millions of American Christians just like me. They call Jesus their Savior and love Him, but they don’t fear Him as their supreme Lord.”

A light went on inside me at that point. I realized we can love Jesus, but that alone will not keep us from falling away. We must fear God as well. Recall Moses’s words: “God has come to test you, and *that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin*” (Exodus 20:20). It is the fear of the Lord that gives us the staying power to not drift away from our obedience to God—as did Lucifer, a third of the angels, and Adam, and as will those in the church who fall away in these last days.

Complete Your Salvation

For this reason, Paul tells us to “work out (cultivate, *carry out to the goal*, and *fully complete*) your own salvation with *reverence* and *awe* and

trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ)” (Philippians 2:12 AMP). We carry out and complete our salvation with reverential *fear and trembling*. This keeps us under the awareness that every thought, word, and deed will be made manifest at the judgment. Having this consciousness keeps us humble, cautious, sober-minded, tender, and aware of temptations to disobey. It compels us to always keep away from what may displease God.

Notice that Paul doesn't say we fully complete or finish our salvation with love and kindness. The fear of the Lord gives us strength to not fall away from His grace into a life of lawlessness. The love of God, on the other hand, keeps us from legalism, which also destroys intimacy with God. Our love for God also fuels our motives and intentions, keeping them passionate and accurate. We must have the great forces of both love and fear in our lives to maintain a healthy relationship with Him. For this reason Paul calls God our heavenly Father and Abba (meaning Daddy) but also says our God is a consuming fire (see Hebrews 12:29). He is love, but He is also just and a holy judge. To not fear Him is to lack enduring stability, and Jesus repeatedly says, “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

Our Influence

The other reason it is critical that we have a firm understanding of eternal judgment and punishment is our influence on others. If we lack the fear of the Lord, we will communicate—either by words or by actions—an unbalanced gospel. This will make those we influence susceptible to slide back or even permanently fall.

As gospel teachers or pastors, if we lack in these foundational doctrines, we will convey extensively the principles found in Scripture about living a blessed, prosperous, happy life. These principles will work, as

they were intended to. They will produce health, financial success, peace, better relationships, and so forth. However, without the foundational understanding of eternal judgments, we will shy back from preaching the cross and the price of following Jesus. We will preach more self-gratifying messages rather than the calling to lay our lives down at all costs.

If we are not driven by eternity, we will live and communicate more to benefit this life instead of seeing life from an eternal perspective. We will teach people to live for the day rather than to live like the patriarchs, who “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Yes, there are rewards in this life for obeying the principles of God. We’ve taught them well. But let’s not forget we are temporary residents on this earth. We are to succeed in this life, but we’re to do so by the standards of heaven, not of our culture. Our real home is not here.

Read carefully the motive of the saints who gave up this world to follow God:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were *strangers* and *pilgrims* on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13–16)

The homeland these saints looked for is the City of God, the New Jerusalem, to which we will turn our attention for the remainder of this book. Those who will live in this city are called *overcomers*. Their reward shall be infinitely better than the very best this life on earth can offer.

GOD'S CUSTOM HOME

*. . . You also are being built together
for a dwelling place of God . . .*

—Ephesians 2:22

We'll divide the believer's judgment into two major categories. First, our involvement in building the kingdom of God in accordance with our callings and gifts. Second, how we built individual lives—which certainly would include our own. In regard to building others, the focus is our influence upon them; in building our own lives, it's how we cooperated with God's grace in developing Christlike character. The latter would certainly be a byproduct of how we responded to God's Word, and of what we believed and our obedience to it. Our actions and works, words, thoughts, and motives will all be examined in all cases.

We'll first examine the judgment of our roles in building God's kingdom; after that, we'll discuss our personal lives.

“What Can You Do for Me?”

Our ability to build the kingdom is entirely based upon our obedience to the Holy Spirit because we can do nothing of eternal value unless it is by the grace of Jesus Christ. We are told, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1). This verse clearly points out that we can build apart from the Spirit of God, yet that labor is worthless in the light of eternity. It will be burned up at the Judgment Seat. It is crucial we understand this.

God tells a group of people in the Old Testament who were busy serving Him:

“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house, then, could you build for me, what kind of place for me to live in? I myself created the whole universe! I am pleased with those who are humble and repentant, who fear me and obey me.” (Isaiah 66:1–2 TEV)

Simply put, the Lord is saying, “I’m God. Are you fully aware of Who I really am? So what is it you think you can do for Me?” The idea that we can create something God is in need of could be compared to a bunch of ants saying to a human being, “We are going to build a house for you.” How ridiculous! We can do nothing in our own strength to serve and please our majestic, unfathomable, and awesome God. He really doesn’t need us.

On the other hand, God then identifies who can please and benefit Him: those who are humble, repentant, and fear and obey God. They are the ones He privileges to build His house. How can they benefit such an awesome God? “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). It is a human being cooperating in obedience to the Holy Spirit that brings results. Only then is a laborer’s work not in vain.

Co-laborers

Here is the staggering fact: as majestic and awesome as the Lord God is, He—by His own choice—restricted Himself in what He does on the earth when He gave man the authority over our planet in the beginning. Consequently, God can be restricted.

This may shock you, but there are examples throughout Scripture. The descendants of Abraham “limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm

78:41). And Jesus said to the spiritual leaders of His nation, “Thus you are nullifying and making void and of no effect [the authority of] the Word of God through your tradition” (Mark 7:13 AMP). We are responsible to cooperate with God to fulfill His desired goal, which is chiefly to have a people conformed to Jesus’s image and likeness whom He can inhabit for all eternity. For this reason, we are called co-laborers:

We are fellow workmen (joint promoters, laborers together) with and for God; you are God’s garden and vineyard and field under cultivation, [you are] God’s building. (1 Corinthians 3:9 AMP)

Almost every time you hear the New Testament reference eternal labor, you will see it likened to working in a field or on a building. Why a field? Because the earth is the field where the growth of the kingdom of God presently occurs. All of heaven cheers while watching the saints build the kingdom on earth. Why a building? Because God is looking for a permanent habitation, and we are the living stones that compose His place of residence.

Peter writes, “Now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple” (1 Peter 2:5 NLT). Paul writes, “Together, we are his house . . . carefully joined together in him” (Ephesians 2:20–21 NLT). So in essence, our reason for being on the earth is to build up God’s glorious temple or *house*, whether it’s by getting others saved, teaching, serving, ministering to others, or something similar. We each have a role as a pure, living stone and as a builder, one who causes the living stones to be fitted and joined together into a glorious house for God. This illustrates the personal and kingdom responsibilities we will all give an account for.

The Custom House

If I’m a custom home builder, I will design and plan the construction of a house before any work on it begins. Drawings will be prepared

detailing how to assemble the house and the materials needed. But that's not all. Every home builder knows that one of the most crucial parts of his job is scheduling the subcontractors at the proper times. These are the framers, concrete men, plumbers, tile layers, electricians—the list goes on extensively. They are the ones who actually do the labor of putting up the building. If they are not scheduled properly, chaos is inevitable. An example would be scheduling the sheetrock sub before the electrical wiring and insulation were installed.

If a subcontractor does a bad job or misses his assigned time, then the builder will call on someone else who can do the job. The newly appointed worker will have to come in on short notice and will possibly have to rip out the bad job done by the previous sub. Even though a subcontractor might miss his assigned job, the builder will make sure the work is finished.

I've also observed that when the builder is working on *his own house*, he is quite particular in finding choice subcontractors. He makes sure they have the finest materials and anything else they require to get the job done right. He will oversee the work with great care. God is the Custom Builder of *His own house*, but His house is a city made up of people!

Frequently on earth, special homes are given names. For example, the queen of England's home is titled Buckingham Palace. In the United States, the president's home is called the White House. Others you may not be so familiar with. The actress Phyllis Calvert's home is called Hill House. Actor/director Charles Ivan Vance's house is called Oak Lodge. The novelist Charles Dyer's home is called Old Wob. And the list continues. However, God started this long before any of us did. He refers to His eternal house, which is still under construction, as *Zion*. We read:

For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: "This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it." (Psalm 132:13–14)

If you've had the privilege of designing your dream house, you know the excitement and anticipation of finishing it. You desire to rest there, for it will be where you will find joy and peace.

Lisa and I had the privilege of building a custom home in the mid-1990s. While we were living in Orlando, Florida, an award-winning custom home builder named Robert loved our ministry and approached us declaring, "I want to build you a home." At the time we were living in a very small house and assumed his prices would be far too high. When we hedged, he blurted out, "I'll do it for a God price." As it turned out, he didn't take one cent of profit from the house.

We had owned two homes prior to this one. They were both tiny tract houses; this meant we had nothing to do with their design. I'll never forget when Robert came to our tract house a few days after our initial conversation, sat down with us at our kitchen table, laid out a blank piece of paper, and enthusiastically said, "Draw your dream house!"

We were stunned. We didn't realize you could do such a thing. Immediately my wife got to work and started drawing. She had been dreaming of this opportunity for years. Eventually I got into the process. It was exhilarating, and our excitement grew more and more as we discovered we could actually design the house however we desired. There were no limitations.

Then we watched our dream house, scribbled on that blank piece of paper, go to the architects and designers. Several days later Bob showed us the blueprints. We could hardly wait for work to start.

When Robert's subs broke ground and started building, we went to the job site every day—sometimes twice a day—through the entire construction process. We were so eager. We couldn't wait for another facet of the house to be built. It seemed those few months lasted years, and days seemed to last weeks, because of the anticipation of something new being done on our house and the ultimate expectation of one day moving in. We were amazed to behold the dream we'd drawn on a blank piece of paper come to life before our very eyes!

In a tiny way, this resembles God's emotions and anticipation for His dream home, but He's been waiting a lot longer than a few months. He's been looking forward to His home's completion since the foundation of the world. We are told, "For the Lord shall build up Zion" (Psalm 102:16), and, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth" (Psalm 50:2).

God has been working on His house for a few thousand years. He laid out the plan before man was placed on earth. He knew in His omniscience that man would fall, even though that wasn't His design or doing. So from His foreknowledge, He planned to build Zion out of redeemed mankind.

God had to start out with the foundation and chief cornerstone, who is none other than Jesus, the Redeemer Himself. Of Him the Father says, "See, I lay a stone in *Zion*, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation" (Isaiah 28:16 NIV). Because the Father designed and planned His house before creation, Jesus is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8), and Peter states, "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20).

Not only is Jesus the foundation and chief cornerstone, but He is also the chief subcontractor. Jesus didn't miss His assignment; He fulfilled it perfectly. In prayer, He spoke these words to the Father just before His crucifixion: "I have *finished* the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4).

God the Father began the whole design of His home by scheduling Jesus at the appointed time (see Galatians 4:4). Then He scheduled the rest of the subcontractors. These subs are you and me. However, as stated earlier, we were to be not only subcontractors but also the materials of His house. As Paul says, "He chose us in Him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). This speaks of our being the materials of the house; we are the living stones.

God also chose us as subcontractors, for we read, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10 NIV). Notice He prepared our assigned tasks in advance. It doesn’t say anywhere in Scripture that our assignments were given from the foundation of the world—although that is certainly possible. We do know that “the works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Hebrews 4:3). However, in regard to our personal assignments as subcontractors, the only thing we find written is that they were given before we were born. David says, “You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed” (Psalm 139:16 NLT).

Our life’s work was foreordained before we were formed in our mother’s wombs. This truth is captured in God’s word to Jeremiah. He said, “I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. *Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world*” (Jeremiah 1:5 NLT). The apostle Paul also writes, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace . . .” (Galatians 1:15–16). These testimonies only confirm David’s words, that all of us were set apart to do specific work for God before we were born.

So here is the amazing truth: God wrote a book about you prior to your birth, and in it every moment of your life was laid out before a single day passed! The question is, will we fulfill what was planned for us? Solomon states:

I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past. (Ecclesiastes 3:14–15)

There is so much in these scriptures. First of all, God has a plan. Nothing can take away from its being accomplished, and mankind cannot add anything to it. However, Solomon goes on to say that the things that are presently being accomplished were in the mind of God beforehand. What is to be accomplished in the future was also in the plan of God beforehand. However, we will have to give an account for that which has already been done! Did we walk in what God ordained for us to fulfill? Did we mess it up or miss our assignment altogether? Did He have to assign another to do what we were called to do in the master plan?

At this juncture I need to make an important statement. Everyone has a divine calling on his or her life. Each of us is an important part of the master plan of God's house. So it is good for us to know this truth:

In regard to your calling, you'll not be judged according to what you did but rather according to what you were called to do!

Let me give you an example. At the Judgment Seat, Jesus may say something like, "Evangelist Anderson, please step forward and give an account of all the souls I called you to impact for Me."

That man may come before Jesus a bit confused and trembling, saying, "Sir, You mean Accountant Anderson, right? I was an accountant with my own firm. This was my occupation. In fact, I set up many churches and non-profit organizations. Those ministries influenced many souls into Your kingdom. Do you have me mistaken for someone else?"

The Master may reply, "No. I called you before you were born to influence and win multitudes in Asia to Me. Give an account of where they are. If you had obeyed Me, you would have been rewarded greatly for all the fruit you harvested for My kingdom. Now as a result, your works will be burned up, for they were not in obedience to Me."

Then we may see this scenario. Jesus may say, "Accountant Jones, please step forward and give an account of what I called you to do."

That man may step forward also very confused and trembling saying, “Sir, You mean Pastor Jones, right? I was a pastor of a church that had nine hundred members. I built that church from the ground up.”

To which the Master may reply, “No, I called you to work in the marketplace as an accountant and build a strong firm that would help many of My churches and ministries effectively fulfill what I ordained them to accomplish. If you would have sought Me earnestly, I would have shown you this. Then all the multitudes of people those ministries eternally impacted would have been credited to you; you would have been rewarded for each soul. But now you will receive nothing for what you did, for it was not in obedience to Me.

“I also ordained you to be the head usher in a church across town from where you started your church. Even though this church’s membership totaled just over five hundred, their members impacted many lives in the community. Had you obeyed, all twenty thousand souls they eternally touched also would have been credited directly to you because you would have been a vital part of this body I called you to. Since you were not there, you will receive no reward for those twenty thousand souls.”

Allow me to give an actual example. Our ministry has a board member who is a dear friend and pastors a thriving church in the southeastern part of the United States. He started the church in 1991 with twenty-two people, and it is now pushing four thousand members. It is one of the easiest churches to preach in because of the hunger of the people. Multitudes have been saved and disciplined in this church.

The church grew rapidly through much prayer, strong preaching, and hard labor, and they built a beautiful building to accommodate the large numbers of people. After several years, my friend observed a distinguished white-haired gentleman, always well dressed, attending the services. He also noticed that this man would sit and watch service after service with tears running down his face. The pastor felt that these weren’t tears of joy.

Finally, the gentleman approached one of the associate pastors and

shared that in 1981, the Lord spoke to him clearly that he was to start a church in that city. A few days later he had a dream about the building this church he was to pastor would meet in. The dream was so vivid that he got a professional to draw a rendition of the building he saw. He then said that he ran into some resistance and backed off from starting the church. After a while, he traveled and ministered in other cities for a short time and eventually ended up back in the business world.

He then opened a carefully folded paper and told the associate it was the artist's rendition of the building he had drawn up in 1981. When the associate looked at the drawing, he almost went into shock. It was the building my friend had built years later, in which they were now meeting. My friend has since ministered comfort to this man, but the gentleman has shared the difficulty he's had in getting over it. (Of course God does not intend for him to live in condemnation but to learn, grow, and find out how he can effectively serve the Lord the rest of his life.)

Several years ago I was speaking on this very topic at a large conference. After the service a pastor, who was quite shaken and a bit miffed, approached one of our team members. This leader said, "He's not serious about what he said tonight, right?"

My team member responded, "Of course he meant what he said. It's the Word of God. Why, what's wrong?"

The pastor, who was over fifty years old, replied, "When I was young, I had a vivid dream of living in and ministering to the people of the Philippines. The dream was so real I believed I was to one day move there. However, it never happened, and now I've been pastoring my church for over thirty years."

Our team member gently responded, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

The pastor was speechless and walked away.

A year later our team member heard from the former pastor. This leader had given the church over to an associate and was now living in the

Philippines and loving it. The former pastor's report was, "I feel for the first time in my life I'm doing exactly what I was created to do."

Allow me to share another story that affirms this truth. A short time ago, a friend of mine set up a dinner for me to meet a Navy SEAL. To protect his identity—because at the time of this writing, he's still in active service—I'll give him a fictitious name, Paul. For two hours I was gripped with awe listening to his testimony.

Back when Paul was in his late teens and early twenties, he'd completed two years of Bible college and was interning in the youth department of a church. After the second summer of his internship, Paul was accused of having sex with one of the girls in the church. Paul said, "John, I didn't sleep with her. In fact, I didn't even find her attractive! However, the leadership not only believed the report, they perpetuated it, and I lost everything. They took away my credibility. My reputation was tarnished, and I was asked—without actually being asked—to leave."

Paul then said, "I sought God like I've never sought Him before. One day in prayer I heard God clearly speak, 'I didn't call you to ministry. I called you to the military.'"

Paul went to the recruiting offices of the Army, Marines, and Air Force and had no witness that he was to enlist. All that was left was the Navy.

As Paul was applying to the Navy, the recruiting officer went down a list of jobs he could enlist under. Paul was greatly discouraged because none of them resonated in his heart as being in line with God's direction. Seeking desperately to sign a new recruit, the officer then offered some special programs within the Navy. When he said the word *SEALs*, my new friend said he knew that was it. He signed the contract.

The recruiting officer tried to discourage Paul because very few make it through the SEALs training program. In fact, Paul was informed that no one from that office had ever made it through and that it was considered the toughest military training in the world! However, Paul was filled with an overwhelming, almost euphoric, sense of taking that first step

into a God journey. He emphatically insisted this was what he should enlist to do.

There were, however, a couple large problems. First, Paul didn't know how to swim. He had to pray and ultimately teach himself. Second, to make matters even more interesting, he had tubes in his ears many times as a child and had had multiple surgeries to open his ear canals. Because of this, even as a young man, if so much as a small amount of water entered his ears, Paul would experience excruciating pain often followed by intense ear infections. But he truly believed that if something was attainable by his own power, it wasn't what God had called him to.

Paul taught himself to swim and prayed earnestly that his ears would be healed. Every day of this water training was painful, but he would not quit. One day, after about four months of persevering through daily agony, not only could Paul swim, but he could dive to great depths completely pain-free! He was healed and ready to embark on the journey to the SEAL teams.

Paul experienced tremendous hardship and resistance in passing the program, but he finally did so and was initiated into that hardened brotherhood forged by war. He's been in the SEALs for over fourteen years and has stories of divine intervention on missions so miraculous that they caused the hair on my arms to stand up.

I knew that evening that I was sitting with a great man of God, yet he was not called to stand behind a pulpit. He was called to reach people in the military and serve our nation in that capacity. Today, Paul is not just a SEAL but a Navy SEAL instructor. He allowed God to correct his course so he could enter into the good work planned for him.

I've heard many examples of people who, unlike Paul, missed their destinies. I've seen examples of it as well. In over twenty years of traveling to churches worldwide, I have seen senior pastors who I knew in my heart were called to be associate pastors, businessmen who I knew were supposed to be in full-time ministry, and even pastors whose calling I knew was to be in the marketplace. I've seen people out of place in the

corporate or business worlds; they worked for someone else out of fear of failing on their own. And then I've seen those who were not faithful to someone else just because they wanted to be their own bosses.

I've seen people marry out of the will of God; their calls have been thwarted. Others have been influenced by or entangled with certain friends who kept them from their callings. I've seen those entangled in recreation, sports, lust for money or power, or various other scenarios. The examples are endless, but whatever the situation, it kept a believer from fulfilling their role in the master plan of building God's house.

These are sobering thoughts, but the good news is that none of us has to veer from the path God has placed before us. God is the Author of our stories, and He is well able to lead us in fulfilling them. The question we should now ask is, how do I find out what I'm called to do as a subcontractor? We'll discuss this important question in the next chapter. We'll also give some insights on how to return if we've veered off the path.