

## How to Earn Crowns

All souls who pass on to heaven will, I believe, be immediately judged by Jesus as they stand before Him as He sits on the Bema seat. That portion of each life lived after having been born-again will be carefully judged in terms of all thoughts, behaviors and deeds, as they pertain to potential crown-worthy rewards. I believe that when the word crowns is mentioned in Scripture it is symbolic of achievements accomplished by our good works and the quality of our lives as we seek to serve the Lord with love, worship and obedience. The following are but twelve of the ways in which our lives are likely to be examined. Somewhere long ago, I read some of this list in a truncated form. What follows is an attempt to explain and therefore to better understand what characteristics of our service to Him will He evaluate.

1. How faithfully, persistently and zealously did we apply our God given abilities in His service? All saved souls have spiritual gifts which we are to recognize and utilize in the ministries we have been assigned as we seek to glorify His name. If we fail to do this out of fear of our inadequacies, we are sinning greatly because we doubt the promise of God who agreed to always be with us, and never assign us burdens greater than we can handle through the power of His grace.
2. How did we treat other believers? Did we respect and love even those we considered to be the lowliest, weakest and most backslidden? Did we sincerely pray for them and seek to help them recover? Or did we ignore them, and tolerate their falling away, thereby actually helping to facilitate their transgressions?
3. How did we exercise our authority over others? Was it in sincere compassion, love, patience and humility? Was it stern but fair, and never exploitive?
4. How did we use our money? We are accountable for our stewardship of all of God's gifts. The tithe already belongs to Him completely and without reservation. Only that given our Lord beyond this constitutes giving. Given that all else that we have is only put into our trust as His stewards, did we waste it on trinkets, excessive pleasures and other needless pursuits, or were we wise stewards who made it serve in ways that glorified Him?

5. How did we spend our time? We are also accountable for trivial and nonsensical waste of our time. How really important were those excursions that pre-empted or subordinated church attendance, Bible study, serious prayer time, communion with Him, service to the needy, and our given ministries?
6. How much did we suffer for Jesus? That's not just suffer, but suffer for Him? Did we avoid revealing our faith to avoid ridicule, exclusion, abuse or punishment? The world hated Him, and as He said, they will also hate His own. Hiding our faith and avoiding expressing it where ever it could glorify Him is an abomination to the Lord.
7. Have we chosen the right race to run, or the ladder to climb as our life's work? Did we in fact avoid that which deep down we realized was the one God chose for us? Did we choose our own path without first seeking His guidance, or did we avoid asking for fear of that to which we might be directed? Paths chosen before we are saved may very well need redirecting, if we will but listen to Him.
8. How effectively have we been in controlling our old nature? It doesn't diminish easily, and I don't believe that it is totally eliminated in this life. It remains to tempt and torment. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit, if we will but allow Him, can this old nature be controlled. However, when we quench, or grieve the Holy Spirit through not confessing our sins, not repenting of them and failing to sincerely pray for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit will remain quenched and grieved, and will not bless us with His guidance and strength, nearly as much as He would otherwise.
9. How many souls have we witnessed to, and tried to bring to Christ Jesus? How many opportunities to do this have we chosen to miss out of fear of rejection, or because we were too busy with more "critical" or "important things?"
10. How effectively have we reacted to temptation? Temptations created by Satan and his demons, as well as his human agents are essentially everywhere. Everyone who ventures out into the "real world" is continually bombarded from every direction with every form of temptation. Whether one is saved or unsaved, the risks of succumbing to Satan's will are exceedingly great unless we seek safety through continuous prayer and conscientious avoidance of those things and the people who represent such temptations. To think we can, by our own strength and armor, resist Satan is folly

and a sure way to failure, which is more often than not, filled with tragic consequences for us and our loved ones.

11. How have we reacted to the thought of Rapture, our blessed hope? Are we eager or fearful? If eager, then we believe, and hopefully are correct, that our lives are all of the time spiritual clean and acceptable to the Lord. If we fear, then we should quickly examine ourselves and straighten out our lives to where we know that we are wholly acceptable at whatever moment He chooses to come for us, or through death, we are taken to Him.
12. How faithful have we been to the Body of Christ? The Body of Christ is the assembly of believers to which we belong. Are we reliable, humble, loving members who come faithfully to every service, Bible study and outreach program that we can physically attend? Sickness and other unforeseen or emergency circumstances are certainly excusable. However, our commitment to the Body should be a top priority and not be taken lightly.
13. How faithful have we been to the Word of God? To be faithful to the Word of God one must KNOW the Word of God. Serious extensive and deep study of Scripture is the only way to know His Word and thereby most assuredly become faithful to it!

Perhaps many will see these criteria too stern and impossible to live by. I am sure that is true for me. My own life is a failure using the above criteria. Remember however, these are goals toward which each of us should feel highly motivated to pursue. It is simply a list of some of the potentially crown-worthy qualities that each of us should strive to bring to the Bema Seat. I suspect that there will only be a few, if any, who will qualify to receive more than just a few of these gold crown. We will at that moment, feel grateful if we receive any gold crowns. The “hay and stubble” crowns are likely to be the most numerous. At that moment, I suspect that we will be most focused and grateful that we made it to the Bema Seat judgment, and not to the Great Throne Judgment.