

# NO MORE EXCUSES



BE THE MAN GOD MADE YOU TO BE

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DR. TONY EVANS** is one of America's most respected leaders in evangelical circles. He's a pastor, a best-selling author, and a frequent speaker at Bible conferences and seminars throughout the nation. He has served as the senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship for more than forty years, witnessing its growth from ten people in 1976 to more than ten thousand congregants with more than one hundred ministries.

Dr. Evans also serves as the president of The Urban Alternative, a national ministry that seeks to restore hope and transform lives through the proclamation and application of God's Word. His daily radio broadcast, *The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans*, can be heard on more than 1,300 radio outlets throughout the United States and in more than 130 countries.

Dr. Evans holds the honor of writing and publishing the first full-Bible commentary and study Bible by an African-American. A former chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys, he's currently the chaplain for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, a team he has served for more than thirty years.

Through his local church and national ministry, Dr. Evans has set in motion a kingdom-agenda philosophy of ministry that teaches God's comprehensive rule over every area of life, as demonstrated through the individual, family, church, and society.

Dr. Evans is married to Lois, his wife and ministry partner of more than forty years. They are the proud parents of four—Chrystal, Priscilla, Anthony Jr., and Jonathan—and have a number of grandchildren.

## ABOUT THE URBAN ALTERNATIVE

The Urban Alternative (TUA) is a Christian broadcast and teaching ministry founded more than thirty-five years ago by Dr. Tony Evans. TUA seeks to promote a kingdom-agenda philosophy designed to enable people to live all of life underneath the comprehensive rule of God. This is accomplished through a variety of means, including media, resources, clergy ministries, and community-impact training. About the Urban Alternative

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# HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

This Bible-study book includes eight weeks of content for group and personal study.

## GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the teaching of Dr. Evans.

**START.** This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video teaching.

**WATCH.** This page includes key points from Dr. Evans's teaching so that participants can follow along as they watch the video.

**MAN UP.** This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to Dr. Evans's video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

## PERSONAL STUDY

Each week provides three days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions: "Hit the Streets" and two Bible studies.

**HIT THE STREETS.** This section highlights practical steps for taking the week's teaching and putting it into practice.

**BIBLE STUDIES.** These personal studies revisit stories, Scriptures, and themes Dr. Evans introduced in the videos so that men can understand and apply them on a personal level. Men should use the other days of the week to reflect on what God is teaching them and to practice putting the biblical principles into action.

## How to Get the Most from This Study

### D-GROUP GUIDES

In addition to the group sessions and personal studies, D-Group guides are provided at the back of this Bible-study book. These guides correspond to the eight weeks of study and are designed to be used in a smaller group of three or four men for deeper discussion and accountability. Each week's guide includes an article written by one of Dr. Evans's sons, Anthony or Jonathan, as well as a guide for smaller-group discussion. Each guide provides helpful thoughts on the week's content and suggests a few questions for discussion by and accountability among the group.

## TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

Follow these guidelines to prepare for each group session.

### PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

**REVIEW.** Review the weekly material and group questions ahead of time.

**PRAY.** Be intentional about praying for each person in the group.

Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

### MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Create a comfortable environment. If group members are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and therefore not engaged in the group experience. Plan ahead by considering these details, include seating, temperature, lighting, food and drink, and general cleanliness. Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

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## ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

**EVERYONE IS INCLUDED.** Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to include any people who visit the group and to invite new people to join your group.

**EVERYONE PARTICIPATES.** Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

**NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER.** Be sure that your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

**NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS.** Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

**INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP.** Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.

**GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL.** Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust God's Word to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.



## Tips for Leading a Small Group

# KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

Encourage group members with thoughts, commitments, or questions from the session by connecting through these communication channels:

**EMAILS**

**TEXTS**

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

When possible, build deeper friendships by planning or spontaneously inviting group members to join you outside your regularly scheduled group time for activities like these:

**MEALS**

**FUN ACTIVITIES**

**PROJECTS AROUND YOUR HOME, CHURCH, OR COMMUNITY**



*Week 1*  
NO MORE  
HIDING  
BEHIND  
THE PAST

Share your experience *#NoMoreExcuses*

# NO MORE EXCUSES

## START

*Welcome to group session 1 of No More Excuses.*

Welcome to *No More Excuses*. In this Bible study we're going to identify and overcome the excuses men use to keep them from being the men God has called them to be. We'll begin by looking at the past.

**What's an event in your past that you often think about?**

Our past is made up of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Many of our experiences have been positive, but many have also been bad or painful. Painful pasts come in all shapes, sizes, and degrees of intensity. Like it or not, our past often influences our present.

**What's an example of something from your past that influences the way you live in the present?**

What can you do to overcome the negative influence of your past? The Bible has a lot to teach us on this subject. Let's watch session 1, in which we'll explore the life of Joseph, a man who overcame a lot of obstacles and opposition to rise to a position of great power, authority, and influence for God's purposes in the world.

*Ask someone to pray before watching the video teaching.*

## *No More Hiding behind the Past*

# WATCH

*Use these statements to follow along  
as you watch video session 1.*

God does not want us to make excuses for the failures in our lives. He wants us to take responsibility.

We can no longer hide behind the past. We can no longer let yesterday define us.

We need God to deliver us from yesterday because too many of us are chained to yesterday.

God wants to deliver men from the hostage taking the enemy has done in our lives so that we're able to blaze into our future, getting rid of the limp and the excuse and not being held hostage to the past.

God can take your yesterday and turn it into an awesome tomorrow.

Forgiving does not mean you don't remember it happened. It means you're no longer seeking revenge because it happened.

God can take the mess of yesterday and turn it into the miracle of tomorrow. He can take the pain of the past and turn it into the productivity of the future. He can take the limp and give you life.

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## MAN UP

*Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching.*

**Read Genesis 50:20.**

Joseph embraced his past because he recognized that God had used it to turn around his present and give him a pleasurable, productive future. We often hear that hindsight is always 20/20. Joseph made this statement in a season of his life during which he lived out the fulfillment of God's plan for him and the nation of Israel. You could say he was already in the winner's circle. But God has called us to live according to this truth even when we haven't yet seen Him turn our circumstances around. He asks us to do that by faith.

**What are some hindrances to living in the truth of Genesis 50:20 before we've seen God turn our situation around? An example might be doubt.**

**What are some benefits of embracing the truth of Genesis 50:20 in full faith? An example might be greater confidence. Identify other benefits.**

In sports if a player fails to make a kick, catch, tackle, or prevent a completed pass, the player sometimes gets up with a limp. At times that limp reflects a real injury, like the one Sebastian Janikowski experienced in the Cowboys-Seahawks wild-card game in January 2019. Following a missed field goal, Janikowski was out for the rest of the game because of a torn hamstring. But sometimes a player gets up and limps when nothing is wrong at all. A player uses that kind of limp, what I call a loser's limp, to imply that he failed because of an injury, not through any fault of his own.

The limp is an excuse. It implies that if the player had been at full capacity, he would have been successful. It's meant to draw attention away from the failure of the present by directing that attention to an excuse that preceded it.

**In what ways might men use this loser's limp excuse in everyday life?**

On the video Dr. Evans said, "God does not want us to make excuses for the failures in our lives. He wants us to take responsibility and ownership. ... That means that

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we can no longer hide behind the past. We can no longer let yesterday define us.” Injury or not, painful past or not, God opposes the use of negative situations in our lives as excuses for personal failures. We’re to own our failures, get up, and move forward.

### **What does it look like to own a personal setback or challenge in the present instead of making an excuse for it?**

Dr. Evans used the example of an enormous adult elephant staying chained to a small stake due to its memory of the past. As a younger, smaller elephant, it couldn’t pull away from the stake. As an adult, it could get loose, but the memory of the past keeps the strong elephant chained because it believes it can’t break free.

### **Name common mindsets that hold men back from fully living out their strength and biblical authority.**

All of us have gone through difficult experiences. Joseph’s example is poignant but not isolated. Joseph got through those days by recognizing that God was with him. God is with you as well. And He was with you during the challenging experiences in your past.

Dr. Evans said Joseph had to forgive yesterday. This meant no longer seeking revenge, sulking, or staring at the past but trusting that God knew how to turn it around for good.

### **Do you need to forgive someone or something? It might even be yourself. Identify benefits of forgiveness that you learned from the video teaching.**

## PRAYER

*Close the session with prayer.*

Father, in a world full of excuses, You’ve asked us to rise above them and live with personal responsibility and ownership. Help each of us identify past hurts and experiences we need to let go of, forgive, and see in the light of Your power and purpose. Help us live as men without excuses as we trust in Your ability to transform our lives. In Christ’s name, amen.

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# HIT THE STREETS

## *Three Steps to Winning the Race*

Every Thanksgiving my family and I take part in what's known as the Turkey Trot. This 5K run/walk brings thousands of people together with the goal of raising funds for the Dallas YMCA. In this race, finishing is winning because all proceeds go to a good cause. But not so for most races. Most races award a first-place finisher with a medal, trophy, jacket, or another symbol of victory. In those races, coming in fifth, tenth, or one-hundredth is never the goal. Athletes train and compete in order to come in first.

Paul pictured the Christian life as a race. He wrote:

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.*

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

Men, I want to challenge you to develop a passion to be a winner for God. Following these three strategic steps can help you accomplish your goals.

### **1. Go for the Gold**

A nice jogging suit doesn't make you a runner, just as wearing a football jersey doesn't make you an NFL player. To go for the gold, you need to do more than be a part of the pack. Never settle for simply getting on the field or in the race. Yet even the glory of a thrilling win on the field will pass. The glory God has for all who know Him is eternal and unfading. One day God is going to reward you for what you do for Him. Because of the nature of that reward, you pursue "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14) with all you have. Living a life filled with excuses keeps you from pursuing the finish line with a fervor and intensity befitting the stakes of your eternal race.



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### **2. Keep Your Eye on the Prize**

Athletes who compete take part in strict training. They do this in order to get the prize. Strict training and hard work are just that—hard. They're disciplines you have to make yourself do. Unless you stay focused on the *why* behind the *what*, you might quit.

We have an Olympic gold medalist who attends the church where I pastor. I've known her since she was a kid. The hours, days, weeks, and months she put into preparing for the Olympics were possible only because she kept her eye on the prize. Every decision she made in the years leading up to her gold medal was influenced by that one pursuit. We, as kingdom men, ought to pursue God's eternal prize with no less effort.

Kingdom men train daily in godliness. They invest in the eternal. They seek to spend time with the Lord in prayer and Bible study, they serve others, and give sacrificially of themselves to the cause of the kingdom.

### **3. Remove Distractions**

The writer of Hebrews expressed the last step this way:

*Let us also lay aside every encumbrance  
and the sin which so easily entangles us.*

HEBREWS 12:1

What's distracting you? In what ways are you spending your time on things that aren't of eternal value? Get rid of it. Stop watching it. Stop talking to them. Stop going there. Whatever stands in the way of fully living out and gaining the victory ought to have no place in your life.

Go for the gold; never settle. Keep your eye on the prize set before you. Remove the distractions holding you back. Follow these three steps, and you'll live as a victorious kingdom man.

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## BIBLE STUDY 1

# *If You're Not Dead, God's Not Done*

Various passages in the Bible picture the Christian life as a race or other athletic competition (see 1 Tim. 4:7-8; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:12). Parallels abound. Both require attention and effort. Both require self-denial and perseverance. Both have a clearly defined finish line we strive for. The finish line of this study is to become a kingdom man—a man who places himself under God's rulership and submits his life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. A kingdom man lives according to God's rule. Now that we have a goal in mind, we'll begin making strides toward the finish line.

Unlike athletic competition, the race for the Christian lasts a lifetime. If you're not dead yet, you aren't finished yet. You still have time to push forward in the race and win. You may be coming to the starting blocks with regrets over personal, family, or spiritual failure. You may have stumbled coming out of the blocks. You may have tripped during the race. You may even be starting the race a little late, but God can help you make up for lost time. He can help you pick up speed in the last half of the race and cover more ground in less time than the average runner.

**Read the following verse and answer the questions.**

*I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

**What confidence comes from knowing that God began and will complete the work in your life?**

Our relationship with God begins with God. Paul was saying that what God starts, He finishes. What God initiates, He completes. God wants us to be involved in His mission

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in the world to make Himself known by making His people more like His Son. He always helps us finish. Sometimes it may appear that God is doing nothing and everything is up to us. Yet God routinely works behind the scenes to lead us toward the finish line

**How do you rest in the confidence that God will carry out His work in your life from start to finish? How should this assurance influence your emotions, prayers, and actions?**

Paul knew how to persevere. He knew how to let go of the past. Paul had a shady past. He persecuted and oppressed the church. But one day Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. That encounter changed Paul's life. He knew the wisdom of forgetting failures and even successes. He wrote about it in Philippians 3. Paul pressed on:

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead ...*

PHILIPPIANS 3:13

**What excuses in failures from you past are you holding on to?**

**You may not be able to completely forget your past, but in what ways can you follow Paul's example of "forgetting what lies behind" and look forward to what's ahead?**

Paul has a kingdom-man attitude. He let go of the things that were behind him. His eyes were straight ahead, focused on the goal. Runners don't win a race looking backward. They have to keep their eyes on the finish line. You can't change yesterday, but you can do a lot about what happens tomorrow. Don't let other people stop you from running for God. Don't let other people distract you from seeking His approval.

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The truth is that if you know Jesus, you already have God's approval. When you believed the gospel, God exchanged all the sin in your past, present, and future for the perfect life of His Son. You're now in Christ, so when God sees you, He doesn't see your past; He sees Jesus' perfect record. God isn't concerned about your past failures; however, He has an unmistakable, amazing way of using even failure to bring about success.

**Often we spend too much time thinking about what other people think about us and allow it to hold us back. Why is it important to focus only on God and His view of you instead of what others think about you?**

God has a purpose for your life, a destiny for you to live out, a plan that He uniquely created you to fulfill. You advance toward that goal by focusing each day on aligning your thoughts, attitudes, and behavior with His Word and His will. Be faithful in the small things, and He will put you in charge of many things (see Matt. 25:21). If you drop a pass or miss a tackle, don't blame others or yourself. Don't get sidelined for a play. Get back up; admit your failure to God, trusting in His provision for your forgiveness (the Bible calls this step repentance); let it go; and move forward in the knowledge that your past doesn't define you. Because you're accepted and forgiven, you're living under God's approval.

Living in God's approval allows us to bear spiritual fruit, which is the outward evidence that we're being inwardly changed by God's work in our lives. For example, when a man lifts weights, the hours in the gym show up as fruit in the body as muscles begin to develop and his body responds to the difficulties it has endured. Similarly, spiritual sculpting takes place when you let go of your past and take responsibility for your sins and your spiritual development. Fruit can include greater patience, tolerance, self-control, love, diligence, leadership, wisdom, grace, and a myriad of other traits and actions that lead to eternal rewards.

**Why would an unhealthy fixation on our past keep us from bearing fruit in the present?**

**Why is it important that we bear fruit after repenting of sin? What does it signify if we don't?**

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For Paul, bearing fruit was rooted in self-control. He tells us:

*Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25-27

The best athletes exhibit self-control. The Greek word Paul used for *self-control* in verse 25 referred to athletes in his day who abstained from unhealthy food, wine, and sex prior to competition. These athletes understood the need for their bodies to be at full capacity for victory. They were willing to invest in themselves to win the prize set before them.

The prize in the Christian life is in the future. Hiding behind the past is harmful because it focuses our attention in the wrong place. It causes us to feel shame and guilt over past failings instead of resting in the approval we have in Jesus and in the confidence that comes from knowing He will finish the work He began. We need to exercise diligence and self-control to let go of the past.

**What's one area of your life in which you're willing to exercise self-control in order to have a greater capacity for spiritual focus and commitment?**

## PRAY

Pray about your personal commitment to God and His expression of greatness through you. Ask Him to give you a glimpse of His plans for your future and to inspire you on your path of spiritual development.

Ask for His help in reducing distractions that keep you from fully pursuing Him. Thank Him for the work He has begun in your life and ask Him to increase your faith and bring it to completion.

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## BIBLE STUDY 2

### *Crown Me*

Ever played checkers? It's a fun game. Once you're able to move a checker to the other side of the board, you get to say, "Crown me." That means your checker is rewarded with all of the rights and privileges of a king. Now that you're wearing a crown, movement and mastery come more easily, and your odds of winning go up.

The kingdom life comes with its own rewards as well. When you obtain these, either in time or in eternity, you're entitled to all of the rights and privileges they supply. Scripture calls them crowns. Today we'll look at five of them.

As a kingdom man, you have all it takes to obtain each of these crowns. You just need to pursue them the way God has instructed. But I have to point out that it won't be easy. Unlike compliments in our culture, crowns don't come cheap. The Greek word used for *crown* is *stephanos*. It means "badge of royalty." The crowns the Bible describes are different from earthly treasure, which is subject to decay and corruption.

**Read Jesus' words in Matthew 6:19-21.**

**Describe the difference between treasure on earth and treasure in heaven.**

**THE CROWN OF MASTERY.** The first crown is the crown of mastery, the reward for faithful obedience, which we've already read about in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25. A man wins this crown by committing to discipline himself in order to compete successfully. No one ever becomes good at anything without disciplining himself. Maybe you've heard of the ten-thousand-hour rule that Malcolm Gladwell made famous.<sup>1</sup> The principle is that it requires ten thousand hours of doing something again and again until you master it. Although ten thousand hours may not be the exact requirement, the point is that consistency creates competency, and competency leads to mastery. You must be consistent in your spiritual walk and development over a long period of time in order to win this crown.

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**Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-25. How can you become more consistent in your spiritual development?**

**We develop spiritually by engaging in spiritual disciplines like Bible reading, prayer, fasting, giving, serving, and others. Which of these would be most beneficial for you? When will you engage in them?**

**THE CROWN OF REJOICING.** First Thessalonians 2:19 tells us about our next crown—the crown of rejoicing. This crown is associated with faithfulness in the work of evangelism. God will honor men who made winning others to Christ the passion of their lives. It's good for us as kingdom men to stop regularly and take inventory of how often we share the gospel with others.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:19. When was the most recent time you led someone to Christ or shared the gospel?**

**With whom could you share your faith this week? How are you building that relationship?**

**THE CROWN OF GLORY.** The third crown is the crown of glory, given for faithfulness in discipleship. The apostle Peter described this crown in 1 Peter 5:2-4. The idea of discipling is to lead someone in such a way that he desires to follow you in your Christian walk. According to Peter, men who lead others to maturity in Christ will be rewarded. They'll be put in God's hall of fame. The word *glory* used in this passage means "to put something on display."

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I visited the NFL headquarters in New York when we filmed for the feature documentary *Kingdom Men Rising*. On one of the upper floors was a magnificent display cabinet running the length of the room. Behind glass was displayed each Super Bowl ring going back to the beginning of the game. Also displayed was the Lombardi Trophy. It was a sight to see! Although these treasures will fade one day, the display case of your discipleship in eternity will last forever. If you're a man who has disciplined many others, people will see your rewards in heaven and say, "Wow!"

**Read 1 Peter 5:2-4. Who has disciplined you? What did you learn from them?**

**What are some ways discipling can take place?**

**THE CROWN OF LIFE.** The risen Christ told the church in Smyrna about this crown.

**Read Revelation 2:10.**

Some men seem to go from one trial to another. God says your hardship doesn't go unnoticed in heaven. When you endure, when you refuse to throw in the towel and make excuses, God has a crown waiting for you. If you hang in there through suffering, knowing God is working His purposes in your life even if you don't know exactly all He's doing, you'll receive this crown.

**Identify times in your life when you've thrown in the towel because it got too hard.**

**Now repent and make a plan to begin pursuing Christ's purpose for you as a man in this area of your life. If you can't recall giving up, thank God for His faithfulness in seeing you through difficult times and ask Him to give you strength to continue.**



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**THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** The crown of righteousness is given for faithfulness in ministry. Described in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, it comes through keeping the faith all the way to the end.

The good news about all five of these crowns is that you don't have to know a special secret to qualify for them. They aren't just for supersaints. Receiving them is a matter of everyday, consistent faithfulness, of getting up every morning and saying, "Lord, I give You my life today as a kingdom man. I want to obey You, to love my wife and children, and to honor You in everything I say and do."

It's important for us to realize that these crowns await us in the future. However, to receive them, we must be faithful in the present. Continuing to hide behind our past will keep us from living in the present and from looking toward the future. All of these crowns are attainable as Christ works in and through your life. He's the goal; He awards us these crowns as we faithfully pursue Him.

**Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8. How does the hope of a future reward in heaven help us remain faithful in the present? Why does faithfulness require us to let go of our past?**

**How does knowing that the crowns come as we faithfully pursue Christ keep you from feeling that you need to perform for God?**

## PRAY

Pray and commit your day, week, and year to Christ. Submit to Him and ask Him to help you pursue Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

1. Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2011).