

IF ... (Part 2)

LEVITICUS 26:1-46

OUR LIVES ARE MEASURED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH AND PROXIMITY TO GOD

*This sermon addresses points III & IV
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IF ... (Part 2)

Leviticus 26:1-46

Last time we were together, we studied through verse 13 of this passage. We said that God instructed the Israelites how to place themselves in a position to be blessed. We said that we could learn from this as well. God made it clear that if the Israelites obeyed His commands and walked according to His ways, they would then be in a position to be blessed.

For the Israelites, it meant that on the Sabbath day each week, they would do no work. On each Sabbath year, they would not plant crops or work the ground for a whole year. And during the Jubilee Year, they would not plant or work the ground for two years and they would redistribute wealth and property. In addition to this, they would create a just and righteous society according to God's commands. If they would do these things, God promised to bring them peace, and prosperity. He promised to provide for them. And most of all, He promised to be with them.

We would do well to understand that even if we were to get filthy rich on our own while ignoring God and His commands, we would have gained nothing. In fact Jesus asked what the benefit would be for someone to gain the whole world but to lose his or her soul.

When we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, He gives us new life; eternal life. He comes into our lives through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, under the loving watchful eye of God the Father. We are given the new status of children of God.

As we faithfully walk in this identity, looking to complete all the good works God prepared for us in advance, we place ourselves in positions that God can easily bless.

It seems as if the Hebrews never lived up to the conditions for blessing. They got all caught up in their pursuit of worldly things, adopting worldly methods, and accepting worldly values.

I'm pretty sure that is true of us in the West who claim to be Christians. We talk a good game. We are good at using religious words, but seldom do we walk according to God's ways. More often than not, we walk according to worldly values. We have forgotten the principle that we will indeed reap what we sew.

"One winter day not long ago, a man returned to his car from shopping at the local neighborhood mall. He noticed a rather foul odor from under the hood. He checked the engine. In the compartment he discovered a dead cat rather mutilated from being caught in the fan belt. The poor cat had sought shelter from the snow and cold and didn't realize the dangers of resting on the engine block. The man proceeded to scrape, pull, and push the remains of the cat into a plastic shopping bag. He closed the hood and went to wash his hands. As he was returning to take the bag from the hood of the car, he saw a woman walk by, look suspiciously in both directions, grab the bag, and hurry off into the mall.

"Well this is too good to be true!" the man thought as he laughed at what the woman had done. He decided to follow her and see what would happen next. She went into a restaurant and surveyed her bounty. She screamed and fainted when she looked into the bag. An ambulance was called and as she was about to be carried away, the man couldn't resist. "Hey lady!" he shouted, "don't forget your package!" And with that he gently laid the bag on the woman's chest, just as the ambulance doors were closing!

Many of us are missing God's blessings because we are not walking in His ways. This passage gives us a chance to reevaluate where we are in our relationship with God.

Let me just help us to get a running start this morning. The main idea of this morning's text, in fact the whole chapter is this. **OUR LIVES ARE MEASURED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH AND PROXIMITY TO GOD.** In other words, the Bible measures success by determining how obedient we are to God, how close we are to Him personally, and how loving we are to Him and to others.

I. REFLECTION (VS 1-2)

Taking Time To Evaluate Our Lives And Recalibrate Them So They Are In Synch With God Is Critical.

We also said that in order to live this kind of successful life, we must intentionally spend time with God. In other words, personal reflection and time in prayer is critical in evaluating where we are. **TAKING TIME TO EVALUATE OUR LIVES AND RECALIBRATE THEM SO THEY ARE IN SYNCH WITH GOD IS CRITICAL.**

II. RECEIVING REWARDS (VS 3-13)

Living In Synch With God Brings Incredible Blessing.

And last time together, we described the conditions for being blessed by God and the blessings He promised. The Hebrews were required to obey God's commands and to walk in His ways. In other words, they were required to obey with their hearts, their minds, their souls, and with their bodies. God promised to provide for them, protect them, prosper them, and live with them. Those are incredible blessings. We too should remember that **LIVING IN SYNCH WITH GOD BRINGS INCREDIBLE BLESSING.**

I don't really want to start out this section negatively, but there were only 11 verses dedicated to the blessings. There are 26 verses dedicated to describing the curses for disobedience. We said the word "if" drove this whole chapter. In this section, when the word "if" is used, it is intensified more each time.

III. RECEIVING REPRIMANDS (VS 14-39)

Living In Rebellion To God Brings Incredible Disaster.

Verses 14-39 describe situations in which the Israelites will be receiving reprimands. We said that living in synch with God brings incredible blessing. The opposite is true as well. **LIVING IN REBELLION TO GOD BRINGS INCREDIBLE DISASTER.** The interesting thing about this whole process is that it seems as if God gives them plenty of warning shots but Israel ignored them. Even though you know I'm not very superstitious and that I don't attribute all illness to spiritual disobedience, in my own personal life, I use illness, especially strange illnesses, as a chance to reexamine my walk with God. I want to make sure that God doesn't need to use a 2 by 4 to get my attention. I want to be soft enough that a gentle nudge from Him will be enough to motivate me to change my thinking or behavior. Please watch and take note of how God works.

A. BREAKING FAITH (14-15)

Verses 14-15 clearly demonstrate what God considers breaking faith with Him. Here we run into our first two "ifs". Through Moses God says, "If you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant." Let's examine these individually.

First of all, failing to listen to God is the first step that leads to rebellion and disaster. The word for listen is the Hebrew word *shema*. Perhaps the most famous and most used phrase in Judaism starts with this word *shema*:

"⁴Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. ⁶And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. ⁷Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. ⁸Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead. ⁹Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 / NLT).

Here is the huge correction we must all make. We come to church week after week, year after year, begging God to listen to us and hear our prayer. When we wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night, we pray that God will hear our prayer. But the whole idea of this passage is that we listen to what God wants and expects of us. Instead of talking in prayer, we should be listening. We all struggle with this and we must intentionally work at changing our attitudes. God does not exist to serve us. We exist to serve Him.

So what exactly does God expect from us? As the *Shema* Passage states, God expects us to love Him. So when we carry out His commands, we do it without pride or without any ulterior motives. And we are called to do it joyfully. The word for command is *mitzvah*. When Jewish children come of age, around 13 or 14-years-old, they go through a religious ceremony called *Bar Mitzvah* for boys or *Bat Mitzvah* for girls. Literally it means they have become sons and daughters of the law. I suppose that refers to the Law of Moses technically, the first five books of the Bible, also known as Torah.

But again, let me remind us that this is not about being religious or keeping religious laws. It's about loving God. In verse 15, the word for reject also means to despise. In other words, we are not to despise God's decrees or abhor God's laws. Christians ought to be people who love God and are anxious to conform to His commands and decrees. One of the most discouraging things in the modern day Christian church for me is that people view it as a place for self-help and self-improvement. In a sense that is true but not the way we define it or mean it. The idea of church ought to be a context and a

community of where we come to listen to God. We come to change our minds, our thoughts, our words and our behaviors so that they conform to the will, to image, and to the nature of God. We ought to come to church to become more Christ-like. We ought to come to church in order to listen for God's will for our lives. Participating in church is not about you or me. Participating in church is a response to what God is doing in our lives. If that was truly the case, there should be no place for pride, arrogance, or self-absorption. Participating in church is looking for a place to serve God.

And we are not to do God's work half-heartedly or sloppily. Bad attitudes, worldly attitudes, and acting out of a personal agenda lead to breaking covenant faith with God. Let me put it to you simply. God views His relationship with us as individuals and as a church as a marriage relationship. If our spouses treated us as we treat God, would we be happy? Would we be happy if they never listened to us and only asked us for the things they wanted? We would be happy if our spouses grudgingly did things for us or half-heartedly did things for us? Would we be happy if our spouses went out and found other lovers? Listen, God takes His relationship with us seriously. How seriously? He gave His One and Only Beloved Son, Jesus to die for us in the most horrible way. God is clearly justified in sending us all sorts of trials, tribulations, and disciplines. We deserve absolutely every bad thing that comes our way. If you don't think that, then we are reading different Bibles and worshiping different gods.

B. BREAKING OUR BACKS (16-20)

Let's see what the God of the Bible says. In verses 16-20, God is described as breaking our backs. One of the things I want us to really notice is this. At any time through this progression of punishments, the Israelites can stop the bleeding simply by confessing and repenting. This has nothing to do with our American view of confessing and repenting. The Bible's definition of confession and repentance starts with godly sorrow. The Roman Catholic theologians make this great distinction. Attrition means that someone is sorry for the mess sin has gotten him or her in to. They are sorry they are suffering and want the suffering to stop. This is not the godly sorrow described in the Bible.

The next type of sorrow described by the Catholic theologians is Contrition. Contrition is a state of sorrow that says I am sorry for offending and hurting God. I am sorry for the mess I have created for God and for others. In the United States, we have come to accept the attrition type of sorrow as genuine. When politicians get up and confess their sin, they expect the public to forgive them and forget their crimes. Sadly, American Christians feel the same way. American Christians feel as if as long as I say I'm sorry, everyone around me is simply to forgive and forget. We'll address that further in verses 40-46. However, for now, let's say that true confession and repentance are focused on how we broke our marriage contract with God. If the Hebrews see the error in their ways, confess and truly repent, they can stop the progression of disasters. That holds true for us as well.

Here comes the first level of disaster. They will live in fear. They will be in constant danger from enemies and they will get physically sick from all this as well. They will experience fever, loss of physical sight, and their energy will wane and waste away. It seems as if all the concern will suck the life right out of them. And to add insult to injury, they will plant crops but their enemies will come into their country and take their food away from them. Listen to what happens to them just about one hundred years after they received these commands:

"1Again the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD'S sight. So the LORD handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. 2The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites fled to the mountains, where they made hiding places for themselves in caves and dens. 3Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, 4camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, oxen, and donkeys. 5These enemy hordes, coming with their cattle and tents as thick as locusts, arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. 6So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help" (Judges 6:1-6 /NLT).

I'm wondering what it would take for God to get our attention? I don't know where you are this morning or what you are going through. But for me, I do not want to push God to the point He has to make my life so miserable and bounce me off the bottom so hard in order to get my attention. In the book of Judges from where I just quoted, Israel fell into a pattern where they would leave God behind, follow their own ways, adopt the customs and religions from the cultures that surrounded them, and offend God to the point He would send all sorts of horrific punishments on them. They would be so humiliated and broken, they would cry out for God to deliver them. God would deliver them but they would soon turn their back on God and God would have to start the cycle of curses all over again. Is that the way we want to live: from curse to curse? Personally, I would rather live from blessing to blessing.

C. BREAKING OUR SPIRITS (21-39)

Here is what is incredible to me. God has made them physically sick, hurt them financially, and even took away their food. But it seems as if no matter how sick people get and how many setbacks they face; they may still be unwilling to truly repent. So in verses 21-39, God commits Himself to breaking their spirits.

1. CHAOS (21-26)

God starts out in verses 21-26 by bringing chaos into their lives. Look how verse 18 starts out, "If after all this you will not listen to Me." If after they have been physically suffering with no end in sight they are still hard-hearted, proud, and stubborn, God will turn it up a notch. Look at the last phrase in verse 18; "I will punish you for your sins seven times over." That clearly doesn't sound good. Can you think about a time when you felt really sick and miserable? Now think about while in this state of suffering, God came to you and said, "You think you feel bad now? I'm going to multiply your suffering by seven times." How would that make you feel? I'm pretty sure I'd be ready to surrender. But the phrase "seven times over" probably means that God will bring to completion another state of misery to the curses. In other words, He is going to humiliate them by making sure everything they work for will come to nothing. Since they were a farming culture, God would punish them by drought and famine. For us, God could make it economically so that we could never get even. God can and will punish us economically.

Look at verse 21. Here are those two phrases again, "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over." How can we continue to suffer and remain proud? I don't know. But here God promises to multiply the suffering again by seven. Can you imagine God saying I'll multiply your suffering by seven, and then multiply it again by seven? Now God starts killing their livestock, and denying them children. You would think that as we suffer and watch our children suffer on our account, that we would get the idea and repent.

But no, look at verse 23, "If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me," again God will multiply the suffering by seven times again. How could anyone of us stand being personally opposed by God? How could any of us stand up to God's hostility? The Bible is very clear that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

The key is this. People will still want to get rid of the suffering, but they would rather die than give up their pride. Listen to what God brought on the Hebrews when they rebelled and refused to repent:

¹⁵The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. ¹⁶But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD'S anger could no longer be restrained and there was no remedy.

¹⁷So the LORD brought the king of Babylon against them. The Babylonians killed Judah's young men, even chasing after them into the Temple. They had no pity on the people, killing both young and old, men and women, healthy and sick. God handed them all over to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸The king also took home to Babylon all the utensils, large and small, used in the Temple of God, and the treasures from both the LORD'S Temple and the royal palace. He also took with him all the royal princes. ¹⁹Then his army set fire to the Temple of God, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value. ²⁰The few who survived were taken away to Babylon, and they became servants to the king and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. ²¹So the message of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate for seventy years, just as the prophet had said" (II Chronicles 36:15-21 / NLT).

What will God have to do to us to get our attention? Why do we consistently refuse to submit to God? Why do we continue to make up our own religion? Please, we must let go of our own cultural ideas; we must give up trying to interpret the Bible as if it were the U.S. Constitution. Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells Timothy:

"¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do" (II Timothy 3:16-17 / NLT).

We must learn to develop attitudes that allow God to correct us through His Word. Too many of us think we know what the Bible says. Too many of us have developed theological constructs. But I'm sorry to say over the years, I have not seen many Christians who really do have a full and balanced view of Scripture and I'm really sorry to say that many Christians, who want to argue theology, don't have a clue as to what the Bible says. Usually these types of proud Christians will quote me a Scripture passage. First of all, the passage is almost always quoted out of context and secondly if it is not taken out of context, it almost always ignores other Bible passages that contradict what they are trying to prove. To form good theology, one must read and study the whole Bible. Any theological point should take the entire Bible into account.

2. DESTRUCTION (27-35)

If chaos in the Hebrew's life and culture is not enough to get their attention, then God will have to bring destruction as described in verses 27-35. Does this sound as incredible and tragic to you as it does to me? Verse 27 starts out, "If in spite of this you still do not listen to Me." And then God goes on to say He will personally come on punish them seven times over again. These seven times seven are really starting to pile up. Let me read what God finally did to the Israelites for their stubborn pride and rebellion:

"⁹Those killed by the sword are far better off than those who die of hunger, wasting away for want of food. ¹⁰Tenderhearted women have cooked their own children and eaten them in order to survive the siege" (Lamentations 4:9-10 / NLT).

How bad does life have to get before we let go of our pride, our arrogance, our false theology, and humble ourselves before God? The Israelites refused to the point where God sent punishment to them that resulted finally in them killing, cooking, and eating their own babies. I think this is a question worth asking, "What would God have to finally do to us before we would be willing to truly humble ourselves and repent?"

3. HUMILIATION (36-39)

And finally God addresses those who were able to survive these ordeals in verses 36-39 by humiliating them. He took all their possessions away and even their freedom. The city of Jerusalem was burned down and totally destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. Along with destroying the city, they demolished the temple. The Jews were scattered and never again became a nation until 1947. And the temple has not been rebuilt even to this day.

Let me just read you a description of what God did to the Hebrews in 70 A.D. This was taken from Wikipedia:

"Josephus had acted as a mediator for the Romans and, when negotiations failed, witnessed the siege and aftermath. He wrote:

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), [Titus] Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple ... the towers [the three forts] ... (were) spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall [surrounding Jerusalem], it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been Inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind. And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor had anyone who had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again.

Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege, of which a majority were Jewish. 97,000 were captured and enslaved, including Simon Bar Giora and John of Gischai. Many fled to areas around the Mediterranean. Titus reportedly refused to accept a wreath of victory, as there is no merit in vanquishing people forsaken by their own God."

Let me just recap this section by saying this. Go back and reread this passage during your quiet time. Notice how it starts out with a simple If ... Then format. And then it escalates each time with the formula, "If after this, you still refuse to change," the punishment increases by a multiple of 7 each time. I don't know what this means to you, but for me, I don't want God to ever have to get further than a simple admonition. I want to have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a soft heart to accept and repent. I want to be like a well-trained horse who responds simply to a gentle tug on the reigns, not like a wild horse that needs the rider to really yank on the reigns. I want to respond to God's whisper, not His 2 by 4 across the back of my head. There is no other way to put this. **LIVING IN REBELLION TO GOD BRINGS INCREDIBLE DISASTER.**

Does that square with our modern day theology? God made people physically sick. He killed people. He made them suffer to the point they even ate their own babies. God will humiliate us if we continue to rebel. Is that the God you come to worship each week? Does that square with your beliefs about Jesus? If not, I'd challenge you to go back, read, and study your Bibles. We know people were getting sick and dying in the New Testament churches because of their sinful attitudes of pride and a refusal to listen to God and change.

IV. REPENTING (VS 40-46)

God Wants To Bless Us.

But this passage ends up with a great deal of hope. We can stop the bleeding, but it takes genuine repentance as described in verses 40-46. The truth is that **GOD WANTS TO BLESS US.**

A. GENUINE REPENTANCE (40-41)

Verses 40-41 describe genuine repentance. Here is a powerful “if” phrase, “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers – their treachery against Me and their hostility toward Me.” True and genuine repentance makes a complete list of the wrongs, the effects of all the wrongdoing, the damage of the wrongdoing, and the personal hurt it caused to God. Anything short of this is not Biblical confession. Further look at the end of verse 41, their uncircumcised hearts must be humbled and they pay for their sin. This could have lifetime implications. For example, let’s say that a husband cheated on his wife. And let’s say the wife chooses to forgive the husband. From that day forward, a truly repentant husband must give up forever the notion that he will be trusted again. He must confess that his wife will never have reason to trust him again, nor does he ever deserve it. Because in reality, there is nothing he could ever say or do that would ever merit trust again. The truly repentant husband has to give up all his rights from that point forward. If we are truly repentant for our sin, we are saying to God that we are totally no good and deserve nothing less than eternal hell. We give up all our rights to claim anything from God.

The amazing thing is that God is willing to forgive:

“¹³At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or I might command locusts to devour your crops, or I might send plagues among you. ¹⁴Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land” (II Chronicles 7:13-14 / NLT).

B. RESTORATION (42-46)

Verses 42-46 describe Biblical restoration. In verses 42-43 we are clearly reminded that we will have to live with the consequences of our sin. The Israelites had to turn back and travel through the wilderness for forty more years until every adult from that generation died off. In fact, God forgave Moses, but Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. There are real and lasting consequences to our sin.

But there is restoration in Biblical repentance. Relationships may be patched up and people may forgive, but never can people go on in the same way before the offense. The challenge with us every day is that when God forgives us, we must look for a new way to go forward. The old way led to rebellion and sin. We must find a new way to go forward and that is why it is good to know that God’s mercies are new every morning. For the wife with a cheating husband, they certainly can never go back to the way things were. But with God’s guidance, they can find a new way to go forward. The truth is that God wants to be in a right relationship with us. He has done everything He could possibly do. **GOD WANTS TO BLESS US.**

V. EPILOGUE

I really can’t offer any insight into how we Christians in the United States have so perverted the notion of obedience, rebellion, rewards, and punishments so badly. The truth is that God does reward righteous attitudes and behaviors. God does punish evil and rebellious behavior. We need to quit measuring our lives according to worldly standards. We must use God’s standards. **OUR LIVES ARE MEASURED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH AND PROXIMITY TO GOD.**

This is not merely for right now. Our attitudes and behaviors have eternal consequences. Listen to what the Apostle John says in the book of Revelation as he describes the final judgment:

“¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a beautiful bride prepared for her husband.

³I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴He will remove all of their

sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever.”

⁵And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making all things new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” ⁶And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give the springs of the water of life without charge! ⁷All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. ⁸But cowards who turn away from me, and unbelievers, and the corrupt, and murderers, and the immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, and idol worshipers, and all liars—their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death.” ...

and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. ¹¹It was filled with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious gem, crystal clear like jasper. ¹²Its walls were broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. ¹³There were three gates on each side—east, north, south, and west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ...

the city, its gates, and its wall. ... was in the form of a cube, for its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles. ... the walls 216 feet thick ...

¹⁸The wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass. ¹⁹The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve gems: the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

²¹The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass.

²²No temple could be seen in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. ²⁴The nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it. ²⁵Its gates never close at the end of day because there is no night. ²⁶And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. ²⁷Nothing evil will be allowed to enter—no one who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

¹And the angel showed me a pure river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ²coursing down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

³No longer will anything be cursed. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. ⁴And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 21:1-22:5 / NLT).

“¹⁵And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15 / NLT).

I think we can just end this section by allowing this description of eternity recalibrate our thinking as to what is valuable and what is not.