

# Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

Matthew 16:21-28

## Introduction

Almost everyone sets goals in life. What are some of your goals? Miss America contestants want to end world hunger or make world peace. Ryan Reynolds said one of his goals was to be done with his paper route. Most people's goals are somewhere in between. Early on in my ministry here, we had meetings where we set goals for the church. We tried to make them attainable, but not too easy to reach. You want to be able to celebrate victories; you don't want them to come without work. But usually, we also have one overarching goal, a **life goal**. This is what drives us and shapes our life. What is your life goal?

## The Prize

As Christians, that goal for us is **eternal life** with God in heaven. That is our goal because we were created for that. That's what salvation is all about. Sin has separated us from God and God has spent the last several thousand years remedying the situation. He called **Abraham** to be the father of His people, which would ultimately produce the **Christ**, who would die to pay the price for sin. After **Jesus** was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven, He sent the **Holy Spirit** to work **faith** in us so that we can receive this forgiveness and **salvation**. We look forward to that day when we will be reunited with Him forever. That's what our life is all about. That's our goal.

## Distractions

The problem comes when we give up on that prize. This can happen in a variety of ways, but what it amounts to is losing focus on our goal. Here are some of the ways this can happen.

## Selling out

Jesus says in **verse 26**, *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"* Sometimes, the allure of the things of this world becomes too great and we go chasing after them. I'm sure you're familiar with the **Faust** story, of a Doctor of Theology who becomes unsatisfied with his life and sells his soul to the devil. This story has taken many forms in literature and movies. However, it's not just a story in literature. This week, I read about five real-life people who have done just that. On the Internet you can buy a **DIY Faustian Kit** that makes it easy for you to sell your soul to the devil.

## Violating the First Commandment

We don't have to be that extreme. According to the **Catechism**, **THE FIRST COMMANDMENT** means, *we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things*. Any time we put anything or anyone else above Him, we've violated that Commandment and taken our eyes off the prize. This includes **fear**. Many people, even some Christians, let the **CORONA VIRUS** shape their life. They live in fear and only do what they think is safe. Some even act like it's the only danger we must concern ourselves with. I'm not talking about washing your hands and wearing a mask. There's nothing wrong with hygiene and precautions, but I'm talking about people living in fear of other people. The masks call attention to a person's eyes. And what I see when I'm out are a lot of people walking around with fear in their eyes.

Some have accepted this lifestyle of fear as the “new normal”, meaning they’re content with living in fear the rest of their lives.

### Trying Another Route

Jesus goes on to say, *“What shall a man give in return for his soul?”* Some people think they can write their own ticket. They think they don’t have to give up their life. They think they can give something else, instead. They forget what Jesus said in **John 14:6**, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* The only way to the prize is through faith in Jesus. Giving money, doing good deeds, doing penance—none of these cut it. There is nothing one can give in return for his soul.

### The Solution

Jesus says the way to keep our eyes on the prize is to *deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him*. To deny myself is to deny my natural instincts, to deny my fleshly desires and needs. In **ARTICLE XXVI—DISTINCTION OF MEATS**, in the **Augsburg Confession**, we read, *Christians are to bear the cross by enduring afflictions. This is genuine and sincere subduing of the flesh, to be crucified with Christ through various afflictions*. God hasn’t given us an easy life. In today’s church, we have lost sight of suffering for Christ. But we’re not alone in bearing our burdens. We’re following Christ, who shares the load and helps us bear the burdens. He’s already borne the burden of our sins.

### Means of Grace

How can we do this? From the **Augsburg Confession**, **ARTICLE XX—GOOD WORKS**: *Without faith, human nature does not call upon God, nor expect anything from Him, nor bear the cross*. We bear the cross only in **faith**. Where do we receive faith? Through the **MEANS OF GRACE—WORD** and **SACRAMENT**. When we hear, read, and study the **Scripture**, when we receive the **body** and **blood**, He gives us the faith to bear the cross and **KEEP OUR EYES ON THE PRIZE** of eternal life with Him.

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*May the peace of God,  
Which pass all understanding,  
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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