in the marketing department of heaven whereby points accumulate for each of us, and these points are directly tied to our “work” on earth.

We do not know the exact nature of these rewards, but we do know, based on the words of Jesus, that the rewards are coming. “*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done”* (Matthew 16:27). *“For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil”* (2 Corinthians 5:10). *“Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward”* (2 John 8). *“For he will repay according to each one’s deeds”* (Romans 2:6).

Incentive programs are designed to attract and keep customers. With that thought in mind, how does that apply to the flight toward your future heavenly home? Does the promise of an as-yet-unidentified reward encourage you to be faithful in your work and service while on earth? If not, perhaps you might be interested in a different program.

A **tiered loyalty program** is a type of membership that offers customers different benefits depending on their rank or the value of the reward. These rewards give customers a goal. The higher their tier - silver, gold, or platinum - the more exclusive and valuable the rewards. Jesus indicates that some rewards will be greater than others. “*Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad,* *for your reward is great in heaven*, *for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Matthew 5:11-12). Jesus explicitly says that the reward for those who face down persecution will be “great,” a tier above, a reward unlike the average reward received by those who are merely faithful.

Throughout Scripture, this greater reward seems to be linked to *suffering*. Those who suffer for Jesus’ sake are members of a unique club. To these sufferers, Jesus offers “crowns.”

* Imperishable Crown*:* “*Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one*” (1 Cor. 9:25). This crown goes to the spiritual athlete who trained, suffered, and sacrificed to win the race.
* Crown of Rejoicing*:* “*For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!”* (1 Thess. 2:19-20). Some scholars refer to this as the “Soul Winners’ Crown.” The apostle Paul expected the Thessalonian church to be his “crown of rejoicing” when he receives his reward.
* Crownof Righteousness*:* “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day*” (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Once again, the link between suffering for the sake of the gospel and the reward of a crown is explicit.
* Crown of Glory*:* “*And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away*” (1 Peter 5:4).
* Crown of Life*:* “*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him*” (James 1:12).

Other tiers might include something the apostle Paul called an “inheritance*.”* For example: “*Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ*” (Colossians 3:23-24). Lastly, there is a reward level that involves great executive responsibilities: “*His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’*” (Matthew 25:21).

**Paid Rewards.** In the early 1500s, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk, would wander from village to hamlet in rural Germany selling indulgences. He would set up a theatrical stage and urge the townsfolk to buy these pardons to get their relatives out of purgatory or to pre-pay for their own sins. He even had a little jingle: “When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.” That’s good marketing! Paid loyalty, or fee-based loyalty programs, give customers immediate and ongoing benefits for a participation fee. Amazon Prime is the most well-known of paid loyalty programs.

But it does not work this way in God’s kingdom. “Paid rewards” is one loyalty program that Jesus does not offer. Jesus does not pay us for our loyalty. Conversely, we cannot “pay” for better customer service, a bigger mansion in heaven, or the best rewards once we stand face-to-face with God. Entrance into heaven is solely a faith-based, grace-driven gesture originating in the heart of God. We cannot buy a reward. We cannot offer our influence, financial portfolio, or good works to get in line for a reward. Rewards are initiated by God. God offers what God offers. God is not compelled to do anything for us. We receive our reward according to our works by the grace of God alone.

The last rewards program is **value rewards**.The intent behind a value-based loyalty program is to connect with customers on a deeper level by donating a percentage of purchases to charities that align with the customers’ values. This program does not reward customers directly, but it holds special meaning, as the rewards benefit the greater good.

Customers who choose value rewards reminds me of the laborers in the vineyards of the Lord. They toil and work in their corner of the world for no other reason than to improve the life of their neighbors. They are motivated to serve Jesus our of love and gratitude. These are the nameless and faceless disciples who serve God in in soup kitchens, foreign missions, food banks, hospitals, schools, and neighborhood watch groups. These unnamed disciples model altruism at its finest and seek no reward. In so doing, they may be in line for the greatest rewards of all.

Ok, so here’s the fine print: The topic of rewards in heaven is a gray area. There is not much we know for certain, except that there will be a reward for God’s faithful disciples. So, at the very least, the idea of rewards should give every committed Christian pause. How loyal am I? What is the value of the work I do? What will be my final evaluation? The apostle Paul addresses this in his first letter to the Corinthian church: “*If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire*” (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). Paul knows that many Christians will stand in line at judgment day with very little to show for their time on earth. Like a person fleeing from a burning building, some folk will have nothing more than the smoking clothes on their backs.

We can do better. We can do stop wasting our time, resources, and lives on things that do not matter. We can build on a solid foundation now, with our eyes on eternity. And someday, we may hear our Lord say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant…enter into the joy of the Lord*” (Matthew 25:23).

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you are faithful to me. Your glory outshines everything. Help me to step out in faith for your kingdom and to dare others to do the same. Do not allow me to grow complacent or prideful. Challenge me to step out in faith and depend on you fully for all that I need. Help me to recognize that your good and perfect will does not always look the way I think it should, but that does not make it any less good or any less perfect. For I desire to be your disciple and follow you all the days of my life. Amen.

Source:Peacock, Lindsey. “Keep them coming back: 7 innovative customer loyalty programs (and how to start yours).” *Shopify*. shopify.com, April 29, 2021. Retrieved November 3, 2021.

**God’s Rewards Plus Program**

Sunday, May 29, 2022 [Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+22%3a12-14%2c+16-17%2c+20-21&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

A preacher and a New York City cab driver died on the same day and arrived at the Pearly Gates about the same time. Saint Peter greeted them, checked his ledger, and then assigned each one a home in heaven. The preacher received a beautiful cottage with a lovely English garden, trellises covered in wisteria. It was small, but charming. The taxi driver’s home was an enormous 15,000-square-foot mansion with gardens, a swimming pool, and a par 3 golf course. Naturally, he was quite pleased. The preacher was not. He complained to Saint Peter, who explained, “It really is quite simple. When you preached, many were bored and fell asleep; but when this guy drove, everyone stayed wide awake and prayed.”

We all like to be rewarded. We work hard. We lead good lives. We give generously. We volunteer our time. We love being recognized for our achievements, and when these efforts are rewarded with cold, hard cash or some extra vacation days, we are thrilled. The business world knows this. Ninety percent of American companies have some sort of rewards program; and seventy-five percent of consumers say they prefer to use companies who offer rewards. Airlines, hotel chains, stores, and coffee shops hype their rewards. Fly X-number of miles and get a free roundtrip flight to Disneyland. Stay three nights and get the fourth night free. Buy supplies at Fleet Farm and get four cents off your next gas purchase. Buy nine grandé, iced, sugar-free, vanilla lattes with soy milk and get the tenth one free.

In our text, Jesus explicitly mentions a ceremony in which rewards will be distributed to loyal “consumers.” Jesus says “*See*, *I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work*” (v. 12). There are basically four types of rewards programs: *Points-based rewards, tiered rewards, paid rewards,* and *value rewards.* Let’s look at these loyalty programs and see which ones apply to us.

A **points-based loyalty program** is the most common and perhaps popular of the rewards programs. The more you use the product, the more points you accumulate; points can be traded for goods, hotel stays or flights. Rewards, by definition, are favors or perks bestowed based on performance. Jesus says as much when he says that his rewards program is based on “everyone’s work.” So, it appears that some tallying system is in place