

# Worthy Worship

Is the way I compete worthy of God?

COMPETE 4 CHRIST

As a kid I loved geography, probably because my Dad was a social studies teacher. I loved looking at maps, calculating the distance between two points, memorizing the names of various mountain ranges, bodies of water, land masses, and countries. I loved it so much that one year my parents bought me a really nice globe for Christmas. It had a classic sort of old school look with lots of earthy colors and the print was very fine so that a maximum number of details could be properly labeled. My globe, as all good globes do, sat slightly tilted on a stand and spun on an axis. To study my globe I gently spun it on the axis and as I did the countries, bodies of water, and land masses rotated perfectly around the center.

What does a globe rotating on an axis have to do with competing in a manner **worthy** of the Lord? Well, did you know that our english word **worthy** is rooted in the same greek word from which we get the word axis? When you see the word **worthy**, in a verse like Colossians 1:10<sup>1</sup> the original greek word is actually axios. In the New Testament when axios is used it's used to describe something of great weight or significance that is focused on what is at the center. Axios or **worthy** is used to describe actions or thoughts or ideas or things that are circulating around and rooted in what matters most. When something is **worthy** of God it's done in such a way that it's clear that God is the axis by which life revolves. **Worthy** actions rotate around the axios in the same way the countries and land masses and bodies of water did on my globe.

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<sup>1</sup> so as to walk in a manner **worthy** of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:0)

In light of these truths about what it means to be **worthy** I ask you this: when we say “That isn’t worth my time” what do we mean to communicate? Are we saying that the object at hand has relatively low value or that our time has relatively high value? I’d suggest that it’s the latter. When you say, “I’ve stopped watching that TV show. It just didn’t feel like it was worth my time” what you are communicating is that your time is too valuable to use watching that particular TV show. The show itself might be an award winning show that everyone agrees is of high quality, but that’s not what you’re evaluating. You’re evaluating if the show is **worthy** of your time.

We evaluate worthiness in a similar way when it comes to judging whether or not someone is **worthy** of a particular leadership role or vocation or office. I’m not making a political statement here, but hasn’t much of the discussion surrounding President Trump been centered-around the question of whether or not the way he conducts himself is **worthy** of the Office of the President of the United States? Most of the time (not always), the question hasn’t been, “Is it ok for the average American citizen to act like that?” Instead, the question is, “Should the President of the United States act like that?” (I’m thinking here primarily about the ways in which he uses Twitter or conducts himself in a press conference.)

The point I’m making is that when we decide whether or not something is **worthy** we are not making a judgement on the inherent value of that particular person, place, thing, thought, or action. When I say a TV show is not worth of my time I’m *not* judging the inherent value of the TV show. Instead, I’m judging my time as having too much inherent value to use on that particular TV show. When we ponder if President Trump’s actions are **worthy** of his position as President of the United States we are expressing the inherent value of the Office of the President of the United States not the inherent value of President Trump.

These are important distinctions to make because because in the New Testament we are commanded to walk or live or conduct ourselves in manner **worthy** of the Lord six times.

that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way **worthy** of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

**Romans 16:2**

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner **worthy** of the calling to which you have been called

**Ephesians 4:1**

Only let your manner of life be **worthy** of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel

**Philippians 1:27**

so as to walk in a manner **worthy** of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God

## Colossians 1:10

we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner **worthy** of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:12

You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner **worthy** of God.

## 3 John 6

In light of these verses we, as Christian competitors, must ask ourselves, “Do I regularly compete in a manner **worthy** of the Lord?” To say it another way, “Do I compete in a way that demonstrates God is the axis of my life?” These are abstract questions with no clear cut answers, but there are some ways you can begin to understand if the way you compete is **worthy** of the Lord.

In an article titled [\*Is My Life Worthy of the King?\*](#) author Tony Reinke suggest four tests we can use to help us answer that very question. Before we dig into his tests, however, let's take a moment to evaluate the way in which Reinke used the word **worthy** in his title. Do you see how the King, our Lord, is established as the axis by which we are striving to live? The question being asked is “Do I live in a manner that is **worthy** of the extreme value of the the King?” Reinke's title doesn't point to the inherent value of life, but the inherent value of the King. With that in mind, here are Reinke's four tests along with adaptations for applying them more specifically to competition instead of life in its entirety.

# Is my life worthy of the King?

**Are my hands bearing godly fruit?**

**Is my mind growing in the knowledge of God?**

**Is my life resilient and patient?**

**Is my heart full of joyful gratitude?**

**As I compete, are my hands bearing godly fruit?**

Reinke's first test is the test of bearing godly fruit. The question you must ask yourself is, “Does my participation in competition bear godly fruit for God's kingdom?” As we reflect on this there are two important things to keep in mind. First, you must wrestle with whether or not you're

willing to strive for bearing kingdom fruit more than you are willing to strive for success as the world defines it. Second, what does a verse like Colossians 1:10 mean when it speaks of bearing fruit?

Often, when I point out that bearing fruit for God's kingdom means wanting to strive for that fruit more than you want to strive for worldly success people respond with, "Well, just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you can't try to win or try to be as excellent as possible." To which I always say, "I agree." Notice that I am not saying that bearing fruit means you shouldn't want to win as well. What I am saying is that bearing fruit must become your primary focus and that winning must become a byproduct of your bearing fruit as you pursue excellence. This is why when I work with individual athletes and teams I encourage them to embrace this definition of success:

# The Christian Competitor's Definition of Success

I pursued my God-given potential and became  
more like Christ in the process.

OR

We pursued our God-given potential as a team and  
everyone became more like Christ in the process.

This definition of success is helpful, but we still need to dig into what it means to bear fruit or to become more like Christ in the process of pursuing our God-given potential. The answer, according to Jesus, is to be like a grain of wheat.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:23b–26)

Jesus is speaking metaphorically about Himself. The time had come for Jesus to be rightfully glorified and

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for God the Father to be worshiped in and through what Jesus was about to accomplish. How will that happen? According to Jesus it will happen when Jesus dies in the same way a grain of wheat must die in order to fall to the earth, plant itself in the soil, and mature to the point of bearing fruit. In order to serve as the atoning sacrifice that would sufficiently cover the sins of all who believe, Jesus had to die on the cross. He had to be put in the tomb so that He could be resurrected as a demonstration of His power over sin and death. Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of mankind, could not bear the fruit of His God-given purpose without dying to self and serving the world through death.

This is a glorious reality that ought to cause us to pause and worship and praise our Heavenly Father for so graciously paving a path to Heaven for all who believe in Jesus. At the same time, however, this is a straightforward challenge to our selfish ambitions and natural tendency to focus on ourselves. Jesus teaches that we are to die to self in a similar way.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

<sup>2</sup>

In Philippians Paul echoes these teachings and unpacks Jesus' metaphor using a little more concrete language.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:3–8)

The point here is that Jesus had to die to self in order to bear fruit and the same is true for you and I as Christian competitors. If we're going to bear fruit for God's kingdom as we compete then we must have an ambition that is unselfish as we die to our own interests and consider the interest of others before our own. This means that our ultimate ambition in sports must be to glorify God. Above all else, we must do everything humanly possible to make sure God is glorified in and through the way that we compete. This requires great wisdom, sacrifice, tact, social skills, etc., but it is the calling for the Christian competitor nonetheless.

## Is my mind growing in the knowledge of God?

One of the reasons we all love sports so much is that sports teach us such wonderful life lessons as we enjoy competition, the thrill of victory, and the agony of defeat. The highs and lows of every season create such incredible opportunities to learn and grow in countless ways.

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<sup>2</sup> John 12:25

The key for the Christian competitor is recognizing that competition is only **worthy** of our time and energy if it is helping us grow in the knowledge of God.

so as to walk in a manner **worthy** of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and *increasing in the knowledge of God...* (Colossians 1:10)

This means that the Christian competitor must never grow content with merely learning the life lessons that sports can teach everyone who participates regardless of whether or not they are believers in Jesus Christ. The Christian competitor must constantly be looking for the ways in which God is teaching lessons that only those who have eyes to see and ears to hear can observe and understand.<sup>3</sup> Reinke points out that for this to happen the Christian competitor needs three things.

- **Revelation from God**
- **Humility in the Christian competitor**
- **Illumination from the Holy Spirit**

When Reinke speaks of revelation from God he's speaking about the Word of God, the Bible. The Bible is a treasure trove of revelation from God. It is so full of wisdom from on high that one can spend one's whole life studying it and still not fully understand all that it contains. Mature Christians, who are living their life in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, spend a tremendous amount of time reading and studying and praying over the Scriptures. If you aren't spending lots of time studying God's Word don't expect to learn any uniquely Christian lessons from competition.

Humility is a term that is often misunderstood and misused. In this context it means three things.

- 1. Embracing the fact that there is always more to learn and understand about God.**
- 2. Acknowledging how often we fail to see things the way we ought to see them.**
- 3. How regularly we must beg God to help us see our competitions the way He sees them.**

## **Illuminate: help to clarify or explain a subject or matter**

As we ask God to help us see competition the way He sees it, we experience the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, under the direction and

guidance of the Holy Spirit we begin to notice more and more of the ways in which God is using every moment of our competition for the good of those who love Him according to His purposes (Romans 8:28).

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<sup>3</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. (Matthew 13:16)

When we are spending time deeply contemplating the truths of God's Word, striving to be humble, and humbly receiving the illuminating light of the Holy Spirit, our competitions will become powerful teachers from the hand of God that help us grow in the knowledge of God and make our endeavours in competition **worthy** of our Lord.

### **Am I resilient and patient as I compete?**

Any given season in competition is a roller-coaster. It doesn't matter if you go undefeated, don't win a single game, or anywhere in between. While the seasons alone are very challenging, it's the year round commitment to workouts, camps, and practices that really demand that you be resilient and patient. To thrive and truly compete in a manner worthy of your Lord you have to develop tremendous resilience and patience.

The good news is that God not only wants you to demonstrate great endurance and patience as you pursue your God-given potential, but He also provides the strength you need to do so.

Paul wanted the church in Colossae to know that he prays regularly that they would be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might. Paul is praying for a lot of beautiful power. It's important for you to see that if Paul prayed for it for the Christians in Colossae than it's something we can be praying for each other and for ourselves. Do not hesitate to go before God and beg Him to fill you will the power you need to endure and be patient throughout your season for His glory.

**being strengthened with all power,  
according to his glorious might, for  
all endurance and patience with joy  
Colossians 1:11**

### **Is my heart full of joyful gratitude as I compete?**

Have you ever played for a coach that you respected immensely and loved wholeheartedly? Can you recall a time that coach asked you to do something you knew was going to be extremely challenging physically or mentally or both? How did you respond? Did you do what your coach asked with a heart of compliance and obligation or did you do what your coach asked with an attitude of joy and thankfulness?

If you've ever had the privilege of playing for a coach you could trust deeply to always do what was in your best interest and in the best interest of the team than you know what it is like to do what your coach asks you to do with great joy and thankfulness. When athletes are given the opportunity to serve a coach that they love by doing what that coach is asking them to do the natural, logical response of the heart is to do what is being asked with joy and gratitude.

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be marked by a sense of joy and  
gratitude that is observable by all  
who are watching.**

...and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father.... (Colossians 1:11b-12a)

How much more should we be willing to serve our Heavenly Father in the same way? The Christian's competition should be marked by a sense of joy and gratitude that is observable by all who are watching. Why? Because the Christian competitor is serving his or her King who is **worthy** of joyful worship in and through every aspect of competition.

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (Colossians 1:12)

But why? Why should we be exposing our motives, attitudes, thoughts, and actions to these four questions which serve as a crucible for our hearts revealing how frail and weak we are as sinners who desire to engage in competition to the glory of God? Why?

Asking why is critical because it's in the absence of why that the commands of the Bible begin to feel legalistic and dogmatic and suck the joy out of being a Christian. Apart from their why the commands found here in Colossians actually suppress joy rather than set joy free in our lives. It is only when we understand the why that we are truly free to enjoy glorifying God in and through competition. Not only that, but it's only when we understand the why that we can finally realize that competing for God's glory is infinitely more enjoyable than competing for our own glory of the glory of our team.

What is the why? Why should you expose your hearts to these four tests? Because if you believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament, than God the Father "has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." The why is the Gospel.

There is a God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He created His image bearers to glorify in Him in all that they do, but the first two image bearers pridefully chose to seek glory for themselves. As a result, every image bearer that would ever exist is cursed by their choice and is desperately wicked and sinful at their core. God, in His perfect holiness, must remain separated from this sin and punish this sin by condemning every sinner to an eternity in Hell. But, in His love, grace, and mercy God sent forth His Son who would live a perfect, sinless life in order to offer Himself as a completely sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all who believe in Him. Therefore, every image bearer can

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experience the free gift of Salvation through God's Son, Jesus, simply by repenting of their sins and believing that faith in Jesus is all that is necessary for Salvation. Image bearers who have received Salvation through faith alone in Christ alone have been qualified by God the Father to inherit all the blessings of God's eternal kingdom and enjoy perfect fellowship with Him forever.

That is why we strive to compete in a manner **worthy** of the Lord. That is why we ask ourselves these four questions about our competitions. As John Piper has famously said, “God is most glorified in us when we are satisfied in Him.” The Gospel is why we find our ultimate satisfaction in offering our competition as **worthy** worship of God.