

FALL 2021

YOU



NO DOUBT

SIX THINGS WE CAN
KNOW FOR SURE

+ + +

WALKING IN CONFIDENCE

A PROMISE THAT WILL NEVER BE BROKEN

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It hurts when people break a promise. Some people make promises they have no intention of honoring. Others sincerely mean well, but circumstances interfere and they're unable to do what they said they promised they'd do.

God is not like us. When He makes a promise, He keeps it. Period. He is always faithful to His word. For example, He promises an abundant and eternal life to those who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.... For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:9,13).

But we don't automatically enjoy the benefits of this wonderful promise. We must understand and believe Jesus died on the cross, taking our sin upon Himself, and then rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us. As we believe, we also acknowledge His lordship, turning from sin and surrendering our lives to Him.

God's promise is for you. If you would like a new life in Christ, repent of your sins and put your faith in Him. Admit to God you are a sinner and ask Him to forgive you. Turn from the sin that has kept you from God and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying something like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

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ON THE COVER

Shunetta is on the cover of this issue of YOU. She began singing in the choir, going to Sunday school, and serving in the church at a young age. This led her to give her heart to Christ at the tender age of six. But things did not always go well. At the age of 13, Shunetta was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. She said she didn't understand why God would allow this to happen to her after all she was doing in ministry. Shunetta also said that her earthly father was not available to support her, so she shut down and became bitter. Up to that time she said she just mimicked older family members at church, but she finally experienced God for herself. Her illness caused her to seek God, and she prayed that Jesus would come into her heart. This time it was based on faith and not on works. The disease caused Shunetta to be very ill, but she said God, being the amazing chain-breaker that He is, showed her ways she was free. From that point on, she began living in her freedom. Shunetta is now a wife, a mother, and a gospel singer. She has just released her first single titled, "I'm Free." She said, "I want the world to know I'm free, and they can be free too!"



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EDITORIAL

MARK CROSTON

Doubt is a struggle we all face from time to time. Unfortunately, doubt diminishes our dreams; hinders our hopes; and frustrates our faith. Doubt is often the difference between the one who achieves their goals and the one who settles for less. It has been said that our faith can move mountains, but our doubt only creates them. When we have doubts about our life in Christ, our spiritual power is weak and our spiritual progress is waning.

The studies in this quarter can help. After we are strengthened by “No Doubt: Six Things We Can Know for Sure” from 1 John, we will look at the life of Abraham to learn the tools required for “Walking in Confidence.” Together these two studies are just what we all need to live successfully in these uncertain times. In addition, get extra insights and teaching tips from our YOU Blog at you.lifeway.com where links to our Lifeway YOU Podcast are provided. Listen to them on your favorite podcast app.

Plan to join me onsite at the Black Church Leadership and Family Conference, July 18-22, 2022, at the Ridgecrest Conference Center, near Asheville, North Carolina, or join me for a virtual experience online. Each year we plan something new to keep it fresh. There is a full program for every member of the family! This is the place where we, along with church leaders and their families, can be refreshed, refocused, and retooled. Get all the details at Lifeway.com/BlackChurchLife.

Now, grab your Bible and allow God to speak through YOU!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Dr. Mark A. Croston, Sr.

YOU General Editor

National Director Black Church Ministries

@BlackChurchLife

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOU

YOU is a three-in-one learner and leader resource with inspirational and educational features to enhance Bible study that leads to spiritual maturity and life change. Here is information to help you get the most out of *YOU*.

LEARNER PAGES

The first half of *YOU* includes pages for personal study. These should be read by the learner and leader prior to group time. Included in each session:

Memory Verses encourage filling the mind with the Word of God to strengthen every aspect of spiritual life.

Keywords identify and define words or phrases to add clarity to the biblical text.

Digging Deeper provides a deeper look at a word, character, or other aspect from the session.

Did You Know? provides an urban or African-American cultural or historical fact or update connected to the session.

Live It sums up the session and offers applications points to challenge daily living.

DAILY READINGS

Included with each session are five devotionals to be read by the learner and leader. The benefits of a daily devotion are innumerable. Their primary purpose in this resource is to focus attention on the biblical content of each session for application of and conformity to the Word of God.

LEADER PAGES

The second half of *YOU* includes pages to guide the teaching of each session. Leaders can use the leader pages to guide learners through the passage and its key emphases as detailed on the learner pages. Here are suggestions on how to teach:

- Prior to the session, read and study the Bible passage, keywords, and learner pages.
- Plan teaching using the leader pages. Keep in mind that because of time, it may not be possible to use every teaching suggestion. Also the teaching suggestions are in sequential order for easy use.
- Features to use when teaching include: The Point, which is readily recognizable on the learner and leader pages; The Question at the top of the first page of each learner session; Keywords at the top of the Scripture pages; “Digging Deeper”; “Did You Know?”; Pack Items* (see next page); “Object Lessons”; and Commentary at the end of each session on leader pages.
- Refine your teaching plans when necessary.

Get more teaching help at you.lifeway.com.

PRAY

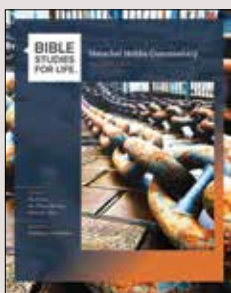
Because the Holy Spirit is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to “rightly divide the word of truth” as you teach your group. Read the Bible passage several times, asking the Holy Spirit to show you its meaning and application.



FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER



The **Advanced Bible Study** is written for learners who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session's Scripture passage, an examination of keywords, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God's truths to their lives today.



The **Herschel Hobbs Commentary** is designed specifically for leaders and provides a comprehensive exposition of each session's Scripture passage. Specific attention is called to items in the biblical text that readers would miss without a commentary. This commentary is based on the King James Version but interacts with all major English translations.



The **YOU Leader Pack** is a collection of teaching aids designed to help leaders provide a visual and interactive experience for learners. Each pack contains posters, charts, maps, and handouts that can add another layer to teaching and engender needed variety that makes learning more interesting.

The **YOU Leader Pack** is located at lifeway.com/YOU



Social Media: Connect with a community of **YOU** users.

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YOU DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

The Pathway of Discipleship

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? Lifeway’s research reveals eight signposts that indicate believers are on the discipleship pathway that leads to spiritual maturity. Each year, *YOU* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit BibleStudiesforLife.com for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2022.

8 SIGNPOSTS	Fall 2021	Winter 2021-22	Spring 2022	Summer 2022
Live Unashamed	No Doubt: Six Things We Can Know for Sure			
Exercise Faith	Walking in Confidence			
Share Christ		Irrefutable: Prophecies that Point Us to Jesus		
Obey God and Deny Self		How to Avoid Life's Pitfalls		
Serve God and Others			Living Life Connected to Christ	
Engage with Scripture			Christ's Return: Living with the End in Mind	
Seek God				The Holy Spirit
Build Relationships				How to Love Your Neighbor

NO DOUBT:

SIX THINGS WE CAN KNOW FOR SURE

HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

+ + +

Live Unashamed.

The Book of 1 John gives us multiple assurances related to our walk with Christ. With such assurances, doubts fade, and we can live our lives undaunted and unashamed.

Writer Bio

Blake Gideon

serves as senior pastor for First Baptist Church in Edmond, Oklahoma. He has served as the President of the Oklahoma Baptist Convention. Blake is passionate about the gospel and finds his greatest joy in seeing the lost become fully devoted followers of Christ. Blake is married to his best friend, Kelly, and they have four children.

Stacey Carmichael

adapted the learner pages for the *YOU* audience. She teaches a Young Women's class at Holy Temple Baptist Church in Memphis, TN where her husband of twenty-seven years, Dr. Brian Carmichael, serves as senior pastor. Stacey also works as a middle school teacher. She and her husband have four children and two grandchildren.



A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT ASSURANCES WE HAVE IN CHRIST

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In 1789, Benjamin Franklin penned this quote in a letter to Jean-Baptiste Le Roy: “But in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”¹ Benjamin Franklin was discussing the perceived permanency of the Constitution. But he knew better.

Like Franklin, we understand there are very few certainties in life. And we know the world would be a much better place in which to live if we had solid assurances related to our day-to-day lives. For example, we want to know for certain our jobs are secure so we can pay our bills. We want to know for certain that if we have a need to go to the hospital, doctors will bring us back to health. We want to know for certain that if we exercise and eat right, we can live a long, healthy life. We want to know for certain that if we save our money, we will have a comfortable retirement. But, let’s face it. Stuff happens, and stuff can happen suddenly.

One day we may go to work and discover we don’t have a job any longer. We may go to the doctor and be given a detrimental, life-altering prognosis. We may exercise and eat right and still face health issues. The stock market may crash and all of our financial investments will be gone.

All is not lost! As followers of Christ, we have assurances that are not in the world. We can find rest in the many promises from the Word of God. This study guides us through six things we can know for sure from the Book of 1 John. The study will include the certainty of forgiveness, a relationship, the truth, victory, God’s love, and salvation.

Things are not certain in the world. We can lose a job. We can have a health scare. We can lose money. But we can find assurances in the Word of God. Then we will realize there really are more certainties in the world than “death and taxes.”

SURE OF FORGIVENESS

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

THE POINT:
WE ARE FORGIVEN
WHEN WE CONFESS
OUR SIN AND WALK
WITH CHRIST.

1 JOHN 1:5–2:2

^{1:5} This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.

⁶ If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

⁷ If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

.....

⁸ If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

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MEMORY VERSE

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰ If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

.....

^{2:1} My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one.

² He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

KEYWORDS

Confess (1:9)—To confess means “to say the same thing,” “to agree.” In this verse, to confess specifically means to agree with God about our sin.

Advocate (2:1)—An advocate is a person who “helps,” who “provides aid.” Jesus is a legal counsel to defend Christians,

particularly from His position in heaven.

Atoning sacrifice (2:2)—The words mean that God has provided His grace through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross so that people can be accepted by God.

WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE FORGIVEN OF OUR SINS?

Can we be sure of anything? Some philosophers will tell you we can't. After COVID-19 arrived last year and shook up our lives, nothing seemed certain.

We can have assurance, though. God desires for every believer to have assurance of salvation. Sadly, many Christians struggle daily with doubt as it pertains to their eternal destiny. Some even believe it's impossible to know with certainty that a person is eternally saved. At other times, believers who are not sure of their salvation find themselves plunged into the depths of doubt and despair, uncertain of whether or not God has truly forgiven them. Others allow their own self-condemnation to smother the assurance God desires for them to have.

But we can be assured of assurance! The apostle John stated this clearly in 1 John 5:13: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." We have God's assurance of eternal life even as we have the assurance of our forgiveness.

Turn from Darkness // 1 John 1:5-7

The character of God is the foundation for our forgiveness. When John wrote, "God is light," he described the very nature of God. Since He is light, "there is absolutely no darkness in him" (v. 5). To describe God as light refers not only to His holiness, but also to His moral goodness. In His perfect righteousness and goodness, God determines the terms for our forgiveness. God's terms are clear: we are forgiven when we confess our sins and commit our lives to walk with Christ.

We are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. John underscored this by looking at this truth from two sides.

- **Darkness.** "If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth" (v. 6). The idea of walking refers to a person's way of life. If anyone lives a life of continual, unrepentant sin and claims to be forgiven, he is tragically mistaken.



THE POINT: WE ARE FORGIVEN WHEN WE CONFESS OUR SIN AND WALK WITH CHRIST.

The gospel's powerful work in our lives is what moves us from darkness (sin) to light (salvation). "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). The ones whose lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel are transferred to the kingdom of the Son and their sins are forgiven!

- **Light.** "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (v. 7). When we turn from darkness and walk with Christ, we are assured of forgiveness. To walk in the light is to live a life consistent with the will of God. Of course, this does not mean we are perfect, but that the trajectory and the purpose of our lives has become the pursuit of God.

WHEN DOES IT FEEL THE MOST DIFFICULT TO WALK IN THE LIGHT?

Tony Evans wrote: "Every week, people have the habit of taking clothes to the cleaners that have been soiled. The job of the cleaners is to freshen them up and get them smelling good again." As Tony Evans said, "Jesus has a cleaning service. He picks up dirty people who have allowed, for one reason or another, their lives to take a turn down the wrong path. And at his cleaning service, Jesus knows just what to do to wash you and make you clean again."² Jesus is the One who "cleanses us from all sin" (v. 7). This is the beautiful message of the gospel: Jesus gave His life to save dirty sinners like you and me. If your life pattern is turning from darkness and pursuing holiness, then don't doubt God's forgiveness toward you.

Confess Our Sin // 1 John 1:8-10

In verses 5-7, John gave a darkness and light contrast to stress we are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. In verses 8-10, he used a similar negative and positive pattern:

- **Deception.** "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (v. 8). Failure to admit sin is a mistake of the highest order. Why would a person fail to recognize and confess sin? Many can't see their own sin because of self-righteousness and self-deception.



DIGGING DEEPER OUR ADVOCATE

An advocate is a person who speaks in favor of, argues a case for, and defends on behalf of someone else. In our day and time, there are child advocates whose primary role is to look after a child's best interests. Essentially, they make sure that the needs of a child are met. As children of the King, we also have an Advocate. Our Advocate is Jesus Christ (John 14:16-21). He serves many roles in this capacity. He's our High Priest, our lawyer, our comforter, and our friend to name a few. He walks with us, having paid a spiritual debt for our sins, lifting us up, pleading our cases before God. Every time our Savior advocates for us, we receive the same judgment: NOT GUILTY! He makes us righteous before the Father. There is no other One like our Advocate, Jesus Christ.

How does knowing that Christ is your Advocate impact your Christian walk?



- **Self-righteousness.** A self-righteous attitude says, “I’m not that bad; as a matter of fact, I’m pretty good compared to some people. Therefore, I have nothing to confess.” When sharing Christ with a young man, I asked him if he had ever sinned. He stated without hesitation, “No!” I asked him if he had ever lied, stolen, or lusted. His answer reflected the self-righteousness of our day. He said, “Of course I’ve done those things, but I thought you were talking about murder and adultery. You know, stuff like that.” Before our conversation was over, he saw how he had broken the entirety of the law of God; sadly however, his pride still would not allow him to confess to God.
- **Self-deception.** Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River on January 13, 1982, killing 78 people. Even though they knew better, the pilots convinced themselves that further de-icing of the plane was unnecessary. They were tragically wrong. People deceive themselves when they try to justify and make excuses for their sins. To deny one’s sin is to call God a liar.
- **Confession.** The opposite of deception is confession. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (v. 9). We are forgiven when we look at our sin in light of Christ’s righteousness and willingly confess our sin for what it is: wickedness against God Himself.

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE SOMETIMES DECEIVE OURSELVES ABOUT OUR OWN SIN?

You have no reason to doubt forgiveness when you confess your sin and walk with Christ. The trustworthy character of God secures the promise of forgiveness. I’m sure you have heard it said that a promise is only as good as the person giving it. Consider then, who is making this promise? God is “faithful and righteous” (v. 9), and His promises are true.

Depend on Our Advocate

// 1 John 2:1-2

John assured his readers, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one” (v. 1). The word for advocate literally means “one who is called to come alongside another.” It’s the counselor for one’s defense in a court of law, a person who intercedes for someone else. I can think of nothing more encouraging than to know Jesus is the One who stands up on our behalf. You have no doubt of forgiveness when Christ is your Advocate.

The foundation of Christ’s advocacy is the blood He shed for our atonement. The reason for atoning is to appease an offended party. Jesus, through His death on the cross, satisfied the righteous indignation of God. However, we are not to perceive God as some pagan deity who is reluctantly appeased because of blood being shed. On the contrary, God the Father provided the sacrifice Himself; thus, He satisfied His wrath by giving His only Son to die in our place. Furthermore, Christ willingly gave His life as our substitute.

THE POINT: WE ARE FORGIVEN WHEN WE CONFESS OUR SIN AND WALK WITH CHRIST.

Therefore, when we sin, Christ pleads our defense based on His finished work upon the cross, which the Father lovingly gave and received. This truth is truly good news! Christ died for the sins of the world. The extent of His atoning sacrifice is for everyone who believes—regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or economic status. He died so that people from every tongue, tribe, and nation could know Him and praise Him.

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT THAT JESUS IS OUR ADVOCATE AND AN ATONING SACRIFICE?

Patients often need blood transfusions after severe accidents or during surgery. Better than any artificial blood, the blood of Jesus saves everyone who receives it. Those who come to Christ face no compatibility issues, and they will find no scarcity of supply. When you find yourself in doubt, depend on Jesus as your Advocate and your atoning sacrifice, the One who shed His own blood for you.

Turning from darkness, confessing sin, and having Jesus as our Advocate and the One who shed His blood to atone for our sins leaves no room for doubt. Therefore, we can be certain

of forgiveness because we have confessed our sin, and we walk with Christ.

DID YOU KNOW?

Botham Jean was sitting in his home on September 6, 2019 when he was shot and killed by Amber Guyger. She mistakenly thought Botham's apartment was hers. A tragic accident took place and a 26-year old lost his life. He was known by others as a church going accountant. What made this case extraordinary was what took place at the sentencing hearing. Brandt Jean, Botham's younger brother, forgave the defendant. He boldly stated through tears, "I know if you go to God and ask Him, He will forgive you. I want the best for you because I know that's exactly what Botham would want for you. Give your life to Christ. I think giving your life to Christ is the best thing Botham would want for you."³ What a powerful example of forgiveness! Because of his forgiveness, he was awarded the 2019 Ethical Courage Award by the Institute of Law Enforcement Administration in Plano, Texas.

How can forgiveness give you peace?

LIVE IT

How can you better focus on forgiveness when you confess your sin and walk with Christ?

Just ask yourself this question, "When have you experienced a time when the promises of God were not true?" All of us should respond with a resounding, "never." So we can also trust the promise of Christ's forgiveness when we confess our sins. We have God's assurance of eternal life even as we have the assurance of His forgiveness. Place your focus on these options this week.

+ + +

- **Focus on freedom.** Spend time in prayer, focusing on Christ and the freedom you have through Him.
- **Focus on confession.** Every time you recognize you've sinned, stop what you are doing, immediately confess it to God, and ask for His forgiveness. Reread 1 John 2:1-2.
- **Focus on forgiveness.** Ask the Lord to reveal to you any unforgiveness you've held in your heart against someone else. If appropriate, speak forgiveness to that individual and spend time in prayer.

DAILY READINGS

1. I AM FREE // ISAIAH 55:6-7

“Your sentence has been pardoned.” These are words that many incarcerated individuals long to hear. Guilty or not guilty, many prisoners are provided a chance to plead their case to a governing board. This board consists of people that can grant the prisoner a parole and an opportunity to re-enter the general population. The prisoner will stand before the board talking about how he or she has been rehabilitated and can be a productive citizen. The outcome is based on the judgment of finite individuals. But praise the Lord! We serve an infinite God who hears our honest, heartfelt confession and grants us freedom from our sins.

All we have to do is turn to God, confess our sins, and He will freely pardon us.

2. A LESSON LEARNED // PSALM 32:5

Toddlers will many times try to cover up their wrongdoing. For instance, they might sneak a cookie from the cookie jar. When asked, they will deny what they have done. But what they failed to realize is their little faces are covered with crumbs. As Christian parents, we will prompt our child to ask for forgiveness. This teaches them the correct response to sinful behavior—admit and confess. They will learn that the response to admitting and confessing will be forgiveness. Just as earthly parents forgive their children, so does our heavenly Father. All we need to do is admit and confess our sin to God. It's the same lesson we learned as children.

The bonus is we don't have to carry the burden of sin. We will be free to faithfully follow God.

3. ALL-FORGIVING GOD // COLOSSIANS 1:13-14

Many of us have done some things of which we are utterly ashamed. We sometimes hold on to these past sins because it seems impossible in our human minds that the Almighty God could forgive what we have done. But thank God we have the assurance

of forgiveness found in this verse. We are forgiven of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. Yes, it is hard for people to forgive, but our God is an all-forgiving God who loves us.

Because He has forgiven us, we have been brought into His eternal kingdom.

4. THIS LITTLE LIGHT // MATTHEW 5:14-16

Many of us learned the song, “This Little Light of Mine,” many years ago. This song basically states that no matter where we are, we should be a light. We are to let this world know we represent Jesus Christ. We hide our lights when we don't speak up because we are ashamed of Christ. We hide our lights when we do what a sinful crowd is doing. We hide our lights when we don't tell others about the Christ we serve. The song refrains; “all in our homes, all on our jobs, everywhere we go.” These phrases emphasize that even in the darkest places, people should see our light as we represent our Father. Our life just might influence someone else to want to know Christ.

Let your light shine so the rest of the world can see to whom you belong.

5. MADE FOR GOOD WORKS // EPHESIANS 2:10

Although mostly a lost art, there are still cobblers in various parts of the world. Cobblers are shoemakers who understand the essential nature of shoes; they protect our feet. Therefore, quality is essential to cobblers, whether they are building custom-made shoes or repairing worn-out shoes. Just as cobblers craft quality shoes, we are crafted by God. Anything God crafts is a masterpiece. We are extraordinarily made by a skillful Father. He lovingly made us to do His will, which includes serving Christ and building up His church. We were not made for our own works, but for good works. This knowledge should motivate what we do for God.

When we have this view, it becomes easy to keep the focus on Christ and not on ourselves.