

CHOSEN!
WON!





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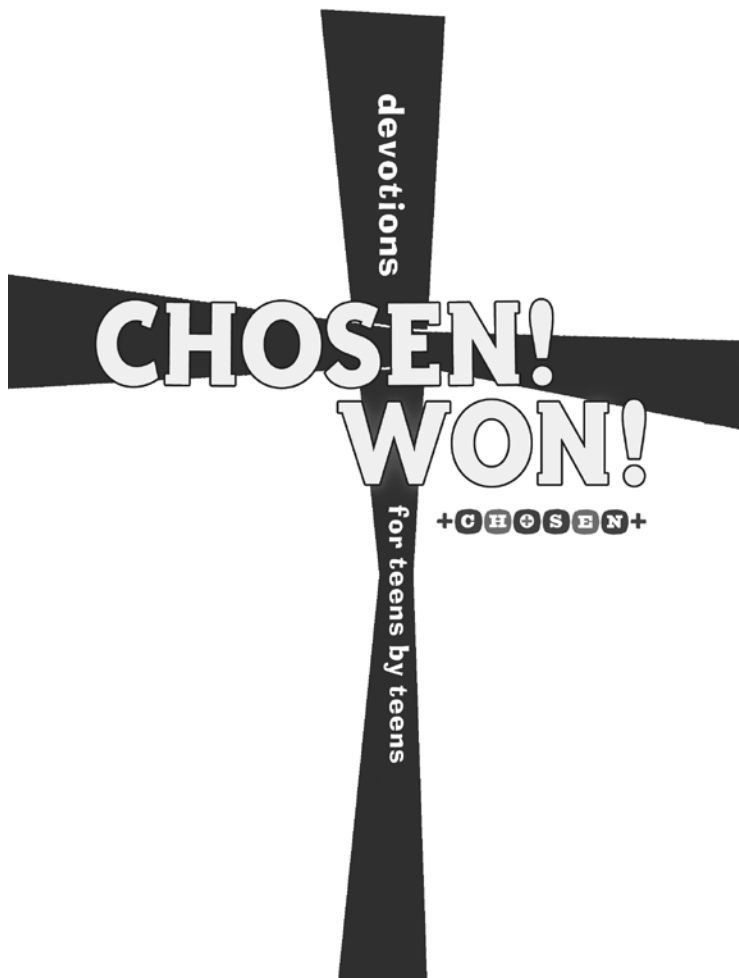
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CHOSEN! WON!

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

—1 Peter 2:9—

The summer of 2007 marked thirty years since the very first LCMS National Youth Gathering. This triennial event brings together thousands of young people from across the United States. They come to celebrate their lives as God's children, His chosen ones, who were won at the cross through the suffering, death, and resurrection of their Savior, Jesus.

This collection of sixty devotions written for teens by teens celebrates this milestone event. Some of the authors are teens today, while others were teens who attended the very first Gathering. Many of those early writers have gone on to lead youth who attended later Gatherings. While our authors may be separated by nearly a generation, their messages still speak to the lives of teens today.

CHOSEN IN CHRIST

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings— and with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers.

—Revelation 17:14—

MARTHA, MARTHA, MARTHA

Things to Do: Finish reading *The Scarlet Letter* for American Literature. E-mail Coach Frank about missing basketball practice on Friday. Help address envelopes for missions offering mailing at church. Read my Bible. Write paper about Crusades for history class. Take Luke out for ice cream . . . sibling bonding time! Do Algebra homework—p. 102–103 #5–72. Go out for coffee with Kelsey. Go for a run! Do my chores.

Does your list of things to do—either written or mental—ever look like this? Filled with homework, tasks, activities, time with friends and family . . . and time with God stuck in there where it fits? I know that, at times, mine sure does. I know that I'm busy, but it's hard for me to decide what I should cut out of my life—it all seems like good



Read: Luke 10:38–42


stuff! I can come up with valid reasons to do everything on my list, and to be involved in everything I have in my life. There's nothing wrong with helping out at my church, hanging out with friends, playing sports, and doing homework, but sometimes, when I do all that, it seems like there's barely any time to spend with God.

Often, I feel like I imagine Martha must have felt when Jesus came to visit her house—and probably throughout the rest of her daily life as well! She got caught up in “all the preparations that had to be made” (Luke 10:40). This probably meant cleaning up her house and making food for Jesus and His disciples. In other words, doing things for Him because she thought she was serving Him! There's nothing wrong with any of these things in themselves. As much as you'd like to tell your mom this when it's your turn to clean the bathroom, doing chores is not a sin!

If you continue reading Luke's account, however, Martha's problem becomes evident. She was spending time *doing* things instead of simply being with Jesus! Here she was with the Savior of the entire world in her living room, and she was off in the kitchen doing stuff! To top it off, she got upset that her sister wasn't helping her. Martha approaches Jesus about it, expecting Him to take her side. Instead, He agreed with Mary's actions, saying, “Mary has chosen what is better” (Luke 10:42). There's nothing wrong with serving others, and with fulfilling the duties that God has placed in our lives—being a student, a family member, a friend. The problem comes when our lives are so filled up with those things that we aren't spending time at the feet of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but it's hard to cut things out of my life so that I have more time with God. Our human nature wants to do stuff, and thinks

that, the more we do, the more God will like us! Like Martha, sometimes it's easy to feel like our lives are made of the things we do—our successes and achievements—and our identity is sometimes found in the activities we participate in. How far is that from the truth, though! Our identities are really in Christ, and Him alone! He doesn't want us to run ourselves ragged doing things to make Him like us more. He already loves us enough that He died for us! He wants us to serve Him, but He also wants to spend time with us. He wants us to sit at His feet (figuratively speaking) like Mary did, so that we can learn from Him in His Word and grow in our relationship with Him. It is at these moments, sitting at His feet, when we are still, that we can really "know that [He] is God" (Psalm 46:1).



Pray: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for the identity that You've given me that is found not in what I do but in You. Thank You for dying on the cross for me, so that I don't have to earn my way into Your favor by my acts of service or my activities. Please help me prioritize my time so that I can spend time at Your feet. Show me the things in my life that I need to change or eliminate, so that my schedule glorifies You, and so that I am not so distracted by everything I do that I forget about what's really important—You! In Your name I pray. Amen.

FULFILLING THE LAW

In our society, we do something to get something. Listen to the television, radio, books, magazines, and fill your life with conditional promises. "Take this pill, *then* you will lose weight." "Use this lotion and you *will* be better looking." "Shop at this store . . . Eat this food . . . Believe in this man . . . Do—and you will have everything you want or need."

We want to be in charge. Even in the first century, people lived this life. "Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?'" (Matthew 19:16). You do something to get something. Makes sense, doesn't it? "How many times do I *have* to go to church?" "Is it necessary to read the Bible *every day*?" "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" (Matthew 18:21).

Jesus replied, "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). *Don't mur-*



Read: Matthew 19:16–26

der, lie, steal; *do* honor your parents and love your neighbor (Matthew 18–19). Jesus pointed that rich young ruler and all of us to the Ten Commandments because we asked Him to. Jesus says to us, “Okay, you want to do something, try these ten.” God gives us our “to do” list. God chimes in with one more stipulation, “You must keep this law perfectly, or else, you will die.”

“‘All these I have kept,’ the young man said. ‘What do I still lack?’ Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me’” (Matthew 19:20–21).

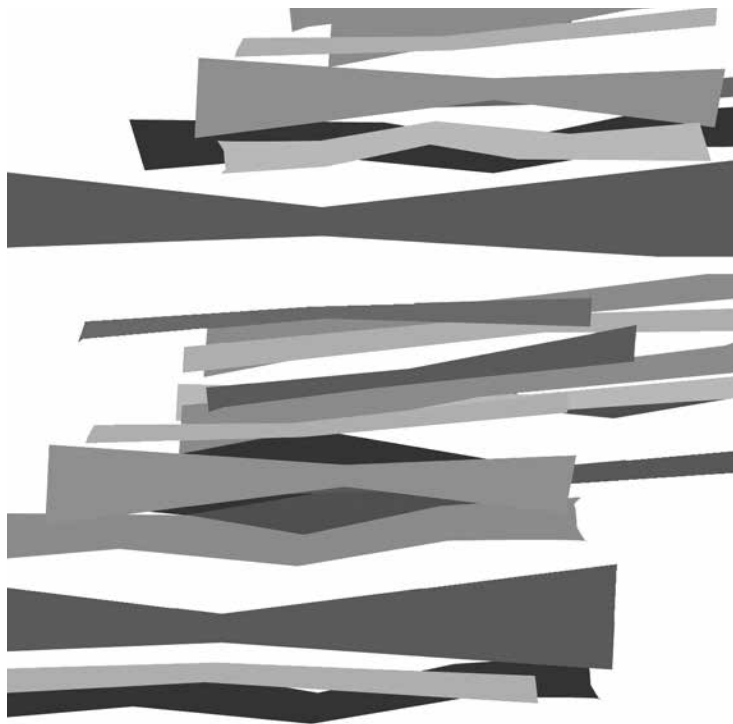
We look at our top ten list and feel pretty satisfied with the way we are living. However, He asks us to do the things we cannot do or do not want to do, and like the man, we go away sad.

The rich young man couldn’t do it; he couldn’t be perfect. We can’t do it either. If we can’t “do something,” then how will we “get something”? “[The disciples] were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’” (Matthew 19:25).

We humbly come to God with our failures, and He directs our eyes to perfection personified. “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10). “Therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Romans 13:10). Jesus took our sins and poured out His life on the cross for us, so that we might live eternally. Here it is in our language: We sin, so we die. The perfect Lamb dies for sin, so we live. “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).



Pray: Dear heavenly Father, I come to You in humility. I have tried to win salvation on my own and have ignored You. Forgive me for my pride. Lord, thank You for the amazing gift of Your only Son, who bore the cross for me. Help me to live a life of thanksgiving and love. In Your most precious name. Amen.



CHOSEN OUT OF THE WORLD

Being Happy in an Unhappy World. The Tao of Inner Peace. Contentment: The Way to True Happiness. Books like these abound in bookstores, at online stores, and on their readers' bookshelves. They promise all kinds of answers and solutions to the problems presented by the crazy, mixed-up world in which we live. And it's no wonder—people seek happiness like pirates hunted buried treasure! In this world, happiness *is* a treasure, rare and hard to come by. The media seems to scream at people, "Don't be content! Want more! Get more! You deserve it!" Just turn on the television and you'll see all kinds of examples of this world's pollutants. Murders, drugs, kidnappings . . . the list doesn't end. All of these sad happenings stem from sin, and




Read: John 15:19

all leave people feeling disheartened and unhappy.

As Christians, though, we know whom to turn to in the face of so much adversity and hardship. Instead of self-help books, we can peruse the one book that truly has answers for us, in the form of God's very words—the Bible. There we see an immeasurable amount of comfort in the hope we have in Him! There He tells us He has something better for us than this world and its sorry state. We no longer have to be affiliated with it; just because we are in this world at this moment does not mean we are *of* it.

Jesus says He chose us out of the world, meaning that we are no longer a part of it. We are separated, detached, disjointed. What a comfort that knowledge is, especially when the weight of the world is so smothering and things seem utterly hopeless! "I have come that they may have life," Jesus said, "and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Those words make me feel so appreciated, so loved. God chose me and wants me to have life—a full, rich one at that. So that I may have that full life, He has separated me from this sorry world, and I'm inexpressibly thankful.



Pray: Dear Jesus, sometimes the things of this world just seem like too much for me to handle! Everything bears down on me and I just feel so helpless, so overwhelmed. Help me to remember that You've separated me from this world. You have a great plan for me, that I may have life "to the full"! Thank You so much for that and for all You do for me, Lord. Amen.

LIFE'S FINAL

How do you feel when you think about the end of something? Depends what's ending, right? In Matthew 24, Jesus tells His disciples that the end is coming and goes on to describe signs that point to the end of the world. Is the end of the world a good thing or a bad thing?

Jesus uses some pretty scary imagery to explain the signs of the end. Look again at the words He uses. That doesn't sound like a good thing! In fact, it's pretty depressing. Kind of like the verses from Isaiah that say, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever" (40:7-8).

Great, so we're all going to pass away, and we're like *dead grass*! Well that sounds like an excellent ending, doesn't it? But look closer at what Jesus is really telling us. Both Isaiah's and Matthew's descriptions of the end conclude with a promise. Isaiah's passage ends, "but the Word of our God stands forever" (40:8). In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says, "but My




words will never pass away” (24:35). These statements hold a powerful, comforting promise for us.

Let’s consider another end—the end of a school year. The last business of the year is finals. Our death, or the end of the world, is like life’s final. Wake up! See the signs! The final is coming, and what’s worse, we don’t know when. But most people find that a final isn’t so bad if they know the material, and God left us a study guide. It’s more than a study guide, really, it’s an answer sheet.

The Bible is the answer sheet for life’s final. And it gets even better! There is only one question—*How am I saved?* The answer? *JESUS!* The final is multiple choice, so don’t be tricked by wrong answers. If you pick, “I’ll be saved because I’m a good person,” you’ll fail the final. If you pick, “All I need is my stuff and all the fun I’ve had,” you’ll fail the final. If you pick, “I don’t know, I’ve never really thought about it,” you’ll fail the final.

As humans, we’ll pick the wrong choices every time. That’s why there’s even more good news. Through the Word the Holy Spirit gives us the right answer, and we believe it! Jesus died to take away all of your wrong choices and He lives to be the right answer. So as you live from day to day, don’t forget that someday the time will come for life’s final. And hang out with Jesus along the way, because He’s a great friend who’s taken the greatest final, the cross, for you.



Pray: Dear Lord, sometimes I am scared of the future. Life can be so uncertain and stressful. Forgive me for not trusting in You with all of my hopes and dreams. Help me to remember that You are in control of everything. Thank You for providing me with the final answer that I need through Jesus’ death and resurrection. In the name of my only hope and salvation, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

If you could spend ten minutes with anyone in the world, who would it be? Your favorite movie star? The President of the United States? The lead singer of your favorite band? Imagine that person actually offered to give you ten minutes of their time . . . ten minutes to talk with them about whatever you want, and they'd listen to your every word. What are the chances that you'd blow them off and tell them, "I'm too busy" or "I just don't want to talk to you"? Probably pretty slim, right?

Now, imagine that God, the Creator of the universe, the most supreme Being, the Savior of the entire world, actually offered to give you not only ten minutes of His time, but every moment of every day to talk to Him. Imagine that He said to you, "I'm here, ready to listen to you whenever you want! You can approach Me with confidence!" Does it make a whole lot of sense to blow Him off, saying,



Read: Hebrews 4:16; Philippians 4:6-7


“I’m too busy” or “I just don’t want to talk to You”?

Well, in case you haven’t figured it out by now . . . God has told us just that. Hebrews 4:16 tells us that we can “approach the throne of grace with confidence,” and Philippians 4:6 says that “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,” we can “present [our] requests to God.”

What a privilege we have! Sometimes I feel like I have to pray, like it’s something that I have to do because I’m a Christian, and that if I don’t pray every day, I’m not doing such a great job. When I think about it not as a command but like meeting with someone famous, I realize what an honor this is—to be able to spend time talking to someone—not just a movie star or the president, but God! That’s when I remember that the reason I pray is not because it makes me a great Christian . . . but because instead of being obligated, I have the privilege of praying, because of God’s great grace and love for me!

In prayer, we can approach God with anything—our hopes and fears, our concerns and problems, our tough decisions, our friends’ and family’s requests, our thanks and praises. God might not always respond to these things in the way that we, in our human understanding, want Him to respond. We do know, however, that whatever His answer, His will is ultimately always accomplished, and that He is working for the ultimate good of His kingdom (see Romans 8:28).

So as you go about your life—today and this week and this month and this year—remember the great privilege that you have. You can approach God, the Creator of the universe, the Savior of the world, with your prayers!



Pray: Dear Lord, thank You so much for the incredible privilege that You have given me—to approach You in prayer, not with fear, but with confidence! Teach me how You want me to pray, and help me speak to You daily in prayer—not because I’m obligated to, but because I want to! In Your name I pray. Amen.

