



"Always make a total effort, even when the odds are against you."  
—Arnold Palmer

18-Jul-25

## **The Hand You Are Dealt**

Some of us are more competitive than others. You know who you are. However, all humans are competitive to some degree and in various areas. Like many, my competitive nature emerges when I play certain games, specifically card games. While not physically demanding, card games can be emotionally demanding. Trust me, if you play a Draw Four card against me in Uno when I only have one card left, I must take a few deep breaths to keep myself in check.

My family has enjoyed card and board games for as long as I can remember. We would often have family game nights featuring various popular games, and while they may have put a strain on my relationship with my sister, I will always cherish the memories.

The big game, however, was one called Shanghai Rummy, a variation of basic rummy. My entire family, immediate and extended, was borderline obsessed with it, and some still are. I forced my wife's whole family to learn how to play.

We would play Shanghai Rummy at every family gathering, from casual get-togethers to Thanksgiving dinners to massive family reunions. From playing

random games to full-blown tournaments, we were rarely without a deck of cards in hand. These games became extremely intense: Cards were occasionally thrown, voices rose, winners gloated, and losers looked crushed. But it was all in good fun. I noticed that the more experienced players displayed less emotion, unless it was for show, because the hand one was dealt did not matter; it was all about how one played the cards.

When one is dealt multiple wild cards, which can lead to almost immediate victory, it is easy to pull back one's shoulders and smirk, looking around the table at each person's disappointment and perhaps horror as he or she picks up lousy card after lousy card, desperately hoping to see at least one wild card. However, as in life, we are not given the perfect hand with all the advantages we could want. In fact, having such a hand does not guarantee success. I once held nearly every wild card in the deck, and my sister still crushed me that round.

When I was in my teens, my dad would often quote Charles Swindoll to me: "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it." While a person is obviously affected by things outside of his control, the responsibility ultimately falls on him to respond appropriately. This adage applies especially in a Christian's daily walk. However, human nature often causes us to respond like victims, believing we are owed more merely because we exist, fueling our selfish desires. When that happens, we often look to anything for fulfillment, to provide us with the cards we lack, believing it will provide the solutions we need to be happy.

[God](#) has something to say about this in the Ten Commandments:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's. ([Exodus 20:17](#))

We have all fallen short in keeping this easy-to-understand [tenth commandment](#). [Coveting](#) is not just wanting what we do not have, or specifically, what others have, but thinking that having those things will satisfy us or make us happy. It addresses the heart.

Perhaps we do not covet a neighbor's car, but we may instead think along the lines of, "If only I had more, I could do more." Instead of looking to improve myself to achieve better things, I begin desiring better skills, values, and attributes without earning them, so that I can say or feel I am better in some way. This commandment zeroes in on the motives behind our desires.

In [Colossians 3:2](#), the apostle Paul reminds us, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." He follows up in verse 5, urging us to "put to death your members which are on the earth: [fornication](#), uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Again, these are heart issues. As people, we are obsessed with having as much as possible, and we look for excuses to justify our desires, which we think will fulfill us.

So, why not prioritize things on the earth? [Ecclesiastes 1:2-8](#) gives Solomon's perspective:

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

These scriptures help shine a light on what truly matters and add to why the commandment against coveting is not merely about wanting what others have. We may want physical things to satisfy us, but they can never truly do so. Ultimately, as Solomon writes, they are vanity, futile. Verse 2 can be rendered, "Empty of all emptiness, all is empty." They cannot fill our emptiness.

We desperately look for satisfaction, and that desire will never go away no matter how much stuff we try to fill it with. Just as rivers run constantly but do not fill the sea, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." We can never have enough.

This principle is why the Bible tells us repeatedly to look to heavenly things, which do satisfy. Notice [Matthew 5:6](#) (*New English Translation*): "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *will* be satisfied" (emphasis ours). Right actions lead to good fruits, which are fulfilling and worthwhile. [Jesus](#) advises in [Matthew 6:19-21](#):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

How many times have we thought, like victims, "If only that had not happened to me, I would be doing so much better." "If only I had more time, I could do more." "If only I had more [faith](#), I could serve more." In the process of shifting our priorities from earthly possessions to heavenly treasures, we still struggle with the residual desire for more, wanting what others have—an ability, a position—rather than being faithful with what God has provided us. It is a difficult process.

In [John 4:13](#), Christ says to the woman at the well, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." He is speaking about what will truly satisfy the human heart, what will fill its emptiness.

It is not wrong to want to do more or achieve more. In fact, desiring the ability to do more good works is a great mindset. We should want to serve God, our brethren, and fellow man more, using God's Spirit in a godly way. But we can too easily become afraid of the costs, lack the faith and endurance, and tire of the effort, wanting to be handed the goods and abilities without cultivating the necessary spiritual fruits with the help of God's Spirit.

To grow requires purposeful action, not just pondering, for mere thoughts provide nothing. To act is to work, and we know we must work ([Ephesians 2:10](#); [Philippians 2:12-13](#))! God's purpose for His Family requires us to take up these challenges, and He promises to provide us with all we need to become successful. He is not looking for mindless drones who accomplish nothing of value, who never learn and grow. He is looking for people who desperately pursue His heart as David did, to do good works in His name, to persevere through trials by relying on Him, becoming stronger and better for them, and becoming a shining example of His way of life.

Paul says in [Philippians 4:13](#): "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." So can we!

Despite our hand, we must avoid the fear and look to God for our fruitful increase. In our calling, we were dealt the most effective wild card of all: a relationship with Christ! This is the gist of the last half of Romans 8:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. . . . [B]ut we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly [waiting](#) for the adoption, the redemption of our body. . . . Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who [love](#) God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Yet in all these things we are [more than conquerors](#) through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers,

nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ([Romans 8:18](#), 23, 26-31, 37-39)

We may think we are playing with a weak hand. We may feel we need what others have or need to be given more than we have to start doing good things or feel fulfilled. However, this kind of thinking is truly nonsense. Physical things cannot increase our spiritual value, and what we have already been given is so much more than we could ever ask for to produce good fruits and ultimately glorify God.

So, play the hand you have been dealt! When you examine your cards, you will see that you hold a wild card, and if played correctly, it wins every single time.

- Hunter D. Swanson

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## New Transcripts

### [1716s: A Footnote on the Start of Christ's Ministry](#)

Given by David C. Grabbe on 01-Jul-23

### [1825: Biblical Loves](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 28-Jun-25

### [1827: The Time of Jacob's Trouble](#)

Given by David C. Grabbe on 12-Jul-25

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Remembering God's Gifts, Promises, and Rewards](#)

by John O. Reid

God gives us the capability of remembering in order to learn and retain

lessons, fortifying us in the midst of grave trials. During these times of intense distress and tribulation, God expects that we use our memories to reflect upon His gifts, promises, and rewards. His gifts include His Holy Spirit enabling eternal life, spiritual gifts to enrich the church, and inspiration during a trial. God's promises include the assurance that He cannot lie, that godliness has immediate and long-term profit, and that He will never, never, never, never, never leave us. God's rewards include attaining the mind of God, membership in His family with a new name, an office or responsibilities in the Kingdom of God-dependent upon our current efforts (at overcoming and growing) related to the abilities, talents, and opportunities He has given us.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [The Tenth Commandment](#)

by Martin G. Collins

A biblical survey of coveting: what it is, what it produces and what a Christian should be doing.

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## Featured Audio Schedule

### Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 18-Jul-25) will be **Acts (Part Eighteen)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday (EST)** and all day Saturday.

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