

Program Transcripts

For July 2020



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

July 2020

Topics subject to change without notice

JULY 5 – ONLY ONE LIFE

You have only one life; what are you doing with it? Some use their lives to make a difference in this world, while others are only chasing after a wind. In this lesson, we're going to see how we can make our lives matter.

JULY 12 – PREPARE YOUR HEART

The future is always approaching faster than we imagine for our children. We must be a generation that prepares our own hearts and the hearts of our children to serve the Lord and not be fooled by the ways of the world.

JULY 19 – CHRIST IS OUR HOPE

When life fills with doubts and darkness, we look to Christ for our hope. Just as clouds can darken but not remove the sun, so life's troubles can darken our lives but not remove the source of all blessings! Let's hope in Christ, our Lord and our Savior!

JULY 26 – A FRIEND TO JESUS

Everyone needs friends. The best friend you'll ever have is Jesus Christ. Jesus knows what it means to sacrifice himself out of love for His friends, and the Lord Jesus wants to have you as one of His friends.

Only One Life

You have only one life; what are you doing with it? Does your life matter, or are you chasing after the wind? The Bible teaches us how to live an abundant life. It helps us to distinguish what's wise from what's foolish, what's important from what doesn't matter; what's good from what's evil. You can search the world over and never find a book that will bless you like the Bible.

Living without God's teaching in your life is like sewing with a needle that has no thread or like writing your biography with a pen empty of ink. Some years ago psychologist William Marston asked 3000 people, "What do you have to live for?" He found that 94% were simply enduring the present while waiting for the future. They were waiting for something to happen someday. They wanted to finish school, or watch their children grow up, or take a long vacation, or retire. They were waiting, not realizing that all anyone ever has is today, because yesterday is gone and tomorrow is only a hope.

Solomon said, "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). You might look at your life and wonder what difference you've made in this world. Is your life merely a striving after wind?

C. T. Studd, nearly a hundred years ago, wrote two lines that make one pause and consider what matters in life. He wrote "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Because there's more to life than the here and now, we must consider our eternal destiny and what matters when this life is over.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:15-21.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

God gives us life one day at a time, and it's brief. Jacob, when he was 130 years old, told Pharaoh, "few and unpleasant have been the years of my life" (Genesis 47:9). One hundred and thirty years still seems long to me, but Jacob called them "few." David said, "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath" (Psalm 39:4-5).

How we live matters, and whether we remember God through our lives is crucial to how we spend eternity. The Preacher, Solomon, wrote, "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

We must take notice of God's Word where he says, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So

then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17). I’d like to suggest some things that we must take time to do:

First, take time to listen. God said through the prophet Isaiah, “Incline your ear, and come to Me: hear and your soul shall live” (Isaiah 55:3). Above anyone else, we must listen to God and hear His voice in all matters. The psalmist said, “Thy testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors” (Psalm 119:24). God’s Word always gives the best counsel, because God has no limits to His wisdom. God’s Word is also a blessing in hard times. Psalm 119:50 says, “This is my comfort in my affliction, That Thy word has revived me.” Again, in verse 52, “I have remembered Thine ordinances from of old, O LORD, And comfort myself.”

Psalm 1 says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

The Scriptures also encourage us to listen to others, to wise people. Everyone needs a listening ear at times. Listening is the first step to loving. Listening encourages and solves problems; it brings comfort and it brings healing. Your life will be richer by far the more you learn to listen. Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory.” Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.” Getting godly and wise advice can make the difference between success and failure. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Second, take time to learn. I don’t know everything that I want to know, for sure; but I suspect you feel that way too at times. Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.” I want to know what God says. Psalm 119:98-99 says, “Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation.” God gives us true wisdom that guides us now and leads us to eternal life.

Psalm 119:133 says, “Establish my footsteps in Thy word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.” We need to know what will bless us and what will hurt us.

The Lord Jesus promises, "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself” (John 7:17). The more you put God’s Word into practice, the more you realize the Bible truly is from God Himself.

The Scriptures teach us how to think, how to deal with others, and how to behave. Paul said, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Could you say that? Could you encourage others to live like you live, to think like you think, or to treat others the way you treat them? When we follow Christ, we know we’re doing the right thing. You can study many things, but only knowledge of God can give you eternal life. How sad to think that many people are brilliant when it comes to earthly things but know nearly nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Third, take time to laugh and rejoice. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.” Many people have forgotten how to laugh or enjoy life. Their lives are sad, dreary, and drab. We should learn to laugh at ourselves, to enjoy others without embarrassing them, and especially to rejoice in the Lord! Paul, while in chains, wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). He found a way to find joy in life even in the harshest of circumstances.

Rejoicing is not merely being happy. Rejoicing comes from something lasting and precious. Ezra 8:10 says, “the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Because we know the Lord, we can rejoice in all His promises and blessings. This joy gives us strength, hope, and promise. After love, joy is the second quality of the fruit of the Spirit. The more we count our blessings, the more that we’ll find joy in life. God is the giver of all good gifts. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” God gives us every good thing that we need. Let’s learn to rejoice every day. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Fourth, take time to lift others. There are many sad things happening all around us, calling for us to lend a hand. Mark 9 tells of the boy who was afflicted with a demon that made him deaf and mute. This demon often caused him to have convulsions and be thrown into the fire and the water. When Jesus commanded the demon to come out of him, the boy convulsed on the ground and lay motionless like he was dead. Verse 27 says, “But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up.” Jesus gave him the help that he needed. Jesus forgave sin, gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, raised the dead, and gave hope to the poor (Luke 4:17-21). He blessed everyone He came in contact with.

Galatians 6:2 urges us, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” There are still many surrounding us who need a helping hand of kindness. Many people are too busy with personal pursuits and pleasures to lift the less fortunate; but the more we bless others, the more we find blessing. Send a note, make a phone call, give a compliment, smile, encourage, and show that you care! First Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” You have “only one life; ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Fifth, take time to love. First John 4:16 says, “God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” The man who doesn’t love is not alive—he’s just merely existing. Everybody needs love and to be loved. First Corinthians 13:1-3 says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

Because Jesus loved us, we can know how to love others. First John 3:16-18 says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

I have a dear friend who lost his wife a few years ago. Each time we meet, Jasper reminds

me to treasure and spend time with my wife and my loved ones while I can. I know he's right. It's time to love our families and our neighbors as ourselves. Today is all you have; all any of us have. When you take time to love, you're serving God. More than anything, we need to love God and love other people! Colossians 3:12-14 says, "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." Beyond all, put on love. "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last."

If your life isn't what you want it to be, today is the best day to change. You can begin today to listen, learn, laugh, lift, and love! You can become the salt and the light of the world by becoming a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through" Him (John 14:6). The Lord Jesus came that you "may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Don't waste your life chasing after dreams in the here and now and then miss heaven. If you place all your hopes on your passions and your pleasures in this life, they will soon disappear; but if you place your hope in the Lord, you can find eternal blessings in this life and the life to come.

Isaiah 1:18-20 says, "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." In Christ, we have hope that we can be forgiven, that we can transform our lives into the kind of people that God can use to bless the whole world. You only have one life, and it will not last on this earth forever. Serve the Lord and make the most of your days! The most important things in life are always expensive; but there is a far greater cost to doing nothing and being unprepared. Life is brief; and as we age, each year passes more quickly than the last one. This means what matters becomes more and more urgent. Cougan Collins recently asked, "If you knew the day you would die, would that change the way that you live?"

There are many uncertainties in life, and we can't foresee what the future holds; but you must prepare for at least one divine appointment. One day you'll stand before the throne of God to give an account for your life. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10). What do you see when you look at yourself? Are you the person that God could honor? Are you living for the Lord or are you chasing after the wind? Don't waste your life with the things that don't matter. Build your house upon the rock by listening to the Lord Jesus and doing what He says! Make your life count for eternity!

The best thing you can do is to place your faith in Christ Jesus who created you. Since you're made in the image of God, let God work in and through you to make a difference in this world. Trust in the Lord and in His words and promises. Turn from sin and follow the Lord in repentance. Confess to everyone that you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and let others know that you belong to Him. Upon confession, be baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Act 2:38). Your commitment to follow Jesus will be the most important decision that you'll ever make. So do it today!

Prepare Your Heart

What is in your heart? Do you have a heart prepared to hear what God has to say? Do you have a heart prepared to meet God? Paul said, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). That's our goal, too! We want to have that pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. We fervently want that for each of you as well. We want everyone to know and to love the Lord. That's why we go to the Lord Jesus to find "the words of eternal life" in Scripture. He is our hope and our delight! He is our Savior, and we need Him.

The Scriptures speak about the heart and how it is the center of our very being. The heart is where we think, where we feel, where we choose, where we plan, and where we determine what we will or we won't do. The Lord Jesus said, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). Our hearts, more than anything else, define our character and our disposition. The heart determines whether we care and to what extent we'll make a commitment. Proverbs 4:23 warns, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life."

If we're not careful, our hearts can deceive us. We can imagine something is true because we want it to be true. God said, "The heart is more deceitful than all else, And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Don't imagine that God doesn't care about our ways and our deeds. We can come to the Lord "just as we are," but we cannot remain that way. God expects our hearts to change, to leave the things that oppose His will, and to grow to be people who delight in pleasing Him.

What is in your heart? Many years ago a man was angry and he went into a long tirade cursing and taking the name of the Lord in vain in the presence of a faithful Christian woman. This man had once attended church and had once been a believer. But once he finished his ungodly speech, she asked him, "Don't you fear God?" Perhaps that's something we should all ask ourselves, "Don't you fear God?"

Our reading today comes from Psalm 78:5-8. "For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments, And not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart And whose spirit was not faithful to God." That's a great admonition to us. Let's pray. Father we're grateful that You have given us Your Word, that we might know those stories of old that teach us and help us to understand what You would have us to do and to be. Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

If we are to prepare our hearts to have a relationship with God, we must do four things. First, we must put our confidence in God. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." It's easy to think that we live in the 21st century and know more than our ancient God. Of course, God is not like us. He's much wiser about life; He's seen men and women fall into the immoral traps that can destroy them. He can see the future that lies hidden to us. That's why we

trust Him and hold to His hand.

Second, we must not forget the works of God. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” Every blessing that we enjoy comes from our Father in heaven. The Lord Jesus said, “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). Our food, clothing, housing, and all of our spiritual blessings – all of them come from Him. So, we remember the Lord Jesus dying on the cross, suffering for the forgiveness of our sins. We remember His promises to care for us, to comfort us, to strengthen us, and to never forsake us. We’re blessed to have a Father who hears our every prayer. We cannot forget what He has done for us.

Third, we must keep His commandments. Love and gratitude lead us to respect and to observe what He’s taught us, His commandments. Some people think of obedience as slavery, or legalism, or a thoughtless ritual. Actually, obedience from the heart is none of these things. Jesus willingly and lovingly endured the cross, taking the form of a servant. Obedience humbles us, yes, it humbles us! But it humbles us for the better. If we wish to be great in God’s eyes, we must learn to obey as a servant. The Lord Jesus said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Though He despised the shame of the cross, He endured it for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Fourth, we must not allow ourselves to become stubborn and rebellious. Our deceitful hearts can lead us to think that we can challenge God, as if we knew more or we knew better than He does. Selfishness and pride can lead to a false heart and a loss of faith. It’s folly to think we can do better without God than with God. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Again Proverbs 14:15 says, “The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.” Once more Proverbs 22:3 says, “The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive they just go on, and they’re punished for it.” Don’t imagine that you can love sin, that you can rebel against God, and then go unpunished. God sees and God knows!

Instead, prepare your heart to be faithful, loving, and obedient. Build up your faith in God and stop doubting! You’re not an accident; God created you! To believe that you just happened to exist is absurd. The theory of evolution is an unproven fantasy. Every cell in your body reveals the wisdom and the intelligence of God. Talk to any microbiologist about the complexity and the incredible resourcefulness of the human cell and know that David was right! He said, “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:13-14).

Prepare your heart, and do it by repentance. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change in behavior. We have to decide whether we will live godly lives or ungodly lives. A godly person is one who takes God and His Word seriously. He turns away from sin and turns to righteousness because he loves the Lord. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” A godly person mourns his old sinful ways and he delights in doing what is right. God said, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

You prepare your heart by having the love of God. Nothing will cause you to love God more

than gratitude. You can't remember the suffering that Jesus endured on the cross, shedding His blood, and not be grateful that He was willing to sacrifice Himself. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This love for Jesus prepares us for the cross that we must bear and the sacrifices we must make. We do so joyfully, knowing that our love and sacrifices please Him.

We don't want a hard heart, we don't want a rocky heart, or a heart choked with worries and pleasures. We want a good and honest heart. We want the seed of God's Word to be planted in our hearts, and we want it to bear fruit. Jesus explains, "Now the parable is this: that the seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard; and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; but these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and they bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:11-15).

In this parable, the seed is the gospel, and the different kind of soil describes how people receive the gospel. Some have hardened hearts that never let the seed in to germinate. The devil comes along and steals the seed, so the person never believes or is saved. Some hearts are like the rocky soil that doesn't allow the roots to go deep enough to keep the plant alive. These hearts leave the Lord when times get rough. The third kind of heart is like a plant in the middle of a bunch of weeds that choke out the water and nutrients. They cannot produce fruit because they have their hearts set on worries, and riches, and pleasures. They have no room for God in their hearts.

But an honest and good heart is different from the others. It takes in God's Word deeply and holds it fast. It doesn't let the rocks or the weeds keep it from growing and producing the fruit intended. That heart glorifies Jesus and honors the Father. It lovingly obeys the Lord and blesses others. A good heart knows how to love, how to be kind, how to forgive, how to help, and how to encourage. A good heart has hope, joy, patience, and inner peace.

A person who has a good heart given to the Lord is indeed blessed. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount describes three important characteristics of the blessed person that is associated with the heart. First, He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The idea of being "poor in spirit" means that I am destitute spiritually on my own. I know that I need the Lord; I cannot save myself by my own strength. The blessed man knows that apart from Christ he can do nothing (John 15:5).

Second, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). The prepared heart knows that it must get right and stay right with God. We must have the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from sin; we don't want to face the Lord without hope. We desperately hunger and thirst for righteousness; and we must have it to live.

Third, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). The pure in heart are not double-minded; they are free from guilt and sin. They've made the decision to "flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). They hunger for purity and they pursue it. They will do their best to be pure in heart and mind and body. Oh, do you have a heart that is poor in spirit, that hungers for righteousness and is pure?

A person with a prepared heart is not afraid to sacrifice. When it came time to build the tabernacle, the Lord God told Moses, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise a contribution" (Exodus 25:2). They brought their freewill offerings. In fact, they brought much more than was needed to build the tabernacle and were told to stop bringing any more.

The selfless Macedonians gave to the needy saints in Jerusalem, and while in a great ordeal of affliction and in deep poverty, they did it; and they did it with joy! Paul said they gave beyond their ability and begged for the favor of participating in support of the saints. He explained, "they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:5). My friend, have you given yourself to the Lord?

A prepared heart gives of himself generously and cheerfully. Paul taught, "Now this I say, that he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). This is true of our money; it's true of our time; and our labors. Give of yourself to God. First John 4:19 says, "We love, because He first loved us."

Why does this matter? How we give of ourselves to God affects how God will treat us in the judgment. We should all seek God's favor and love. Take notice of David's advice, "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever" (1 Chronicles 28:9). Are you seeking the Lord? Let's pray. O Father, help each of us to seek You, to always want to serve You and to love You, and to be the kind of people that You are happy to know. Father, we pray that Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

God said, "'Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord GOD. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord GOD. 'Therefore, repent and live'" (Ezekiel 18:30-32). Repentance turns the heart away from the ways of sin to the ways of God. Repentance gives us a new heart, new values, and new priorities.

We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day to be judged for what we have done, good or bad. God doesn't want to condemn us; He wants to save us. Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Love, faith, and repentance prepare our hearts for obedience. When we obey from the heart we leave an old way of life and begin a new one. Romans 6:17-18 says, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, you become the slaves of righteousness."

We obey when we're baptized into Christ. In baptism, God unites us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ according to Romans 6:3-7 and Colossians 2:12-13. It's the blood of Christ that washes away our sins when we're baptized into His death. So, prepare your heart to obey the Lord. Don't wait another day to obey Him.

Christ is our Hope

When you belong to Christ, you have the greatest hope in the world. With Christ in your life, no one can steal your hope. Through His Word, the Father in heaven opens our eyes to the truth. The Scriptures provide us a perspective to see more than the struggles and troubles in life. They give us hope and promise of God's care. They teach us God's love and His desire to save us. They give us hope in every aspect of life. Give me the Bible, nothing else will do.

Several years ago, I took my first commercial airplane flight. I boarded an old plane of a small company on a snowy, cloudy, December day. They had to de-ice the plane twice before we took off. Oh, I was cold; I was alone, and more than a little nervous. I listened closely to the safety speech about seat belts. I admit it was tense! The plane slowly got off the ground. Up we climbed into the clouds, and I was not prepared for what happened next. I should have realized the obvious. We passed above the clouds into the brightness of the day. The sun still shines above the clouds.

Clouds move in and out with their rain and shadows. They can temporarily mask the sun, but they cannot stop it from shining. So it is with the Lord! When you're tempted to think all is lost, it's helpful to remember: the Father is still on the throne. Remember the blood of Jesus still cleanses from sin. The Bible stands as Jesus said, "It is written." The Lord Jesus is still coming again for His people. The gospel still has power to save, and prayer still reaches the ear of the Heavenly Father.

Our reading today is from Romans 5:1-5. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Let's pray together. O, Father, we're thankful for hope, and even in the toughest of times we know that You love us and that You watch over us and bless us with good things. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

I love Edward Mote's hymn, because I know it's true. I grew up singing it. He wrote, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand." Someone has said, "Hope is as necessary to the spirit as oxygen is to the body." As Christians, we have hope even in the hardest times. Hope in Jesus Christ is our confident expectation that God will meet all our needs in this life and bless us with life in heaven. In Christ, we have a wonderful living hope!

The inspired apostle Paul promised the church in Philippi, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). When we become Christians through our faith, repentance, and baptism, all out of love, we can count on our Father in heaven washing away our sins with the blood of Christ. By His grace we can count on being added to His church, His family, becoming His children, and enjoying His favor. Christ is our hope and our rock. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life;

no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). The whole world may change under our noses, but nothing changes the fact that Jesus is Lord and the way to heaven.

The early church went through some terrible times at the hands of the Roman Emperors. Early Christians faced gladiators, wild beasts, prison, and crucifixion from the hands of people who did not understand them, but all their troubles did not remove the love of God. The Bible says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather He who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31-39).

The Holy Spirit wrote, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The Scriptures do indeed give us hope; they help us see the problems of life are not new. Others have suffered through the same struggles that you and I face and have succeeded with God’s help. If God could help them, He can help us. If God could forgive them, He can forgive us. If God has kept His promises to them, we know He will keep His promises to us.

The Scriptures teach us of God’s mighty arm bringing Israel out of Egypt, of the crossing of the Red Sea; it teaches us of the manna in the wilderness, and of the falling of the walls of Jericho. In his last days, Joshua could proclaim to all Israel, “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; and not one of them has failed” (Joshua 23:14). The Scriptures teach us how God liberated Israel through the judges, and how David won over Goliath through the help of God. When the people followed God, God was with them and blessed them. Hope is our confident expectation, an expectation that God will provide what He promises.

Because God has all power, because God loves us with a great love, and because God keeps His promises, we can have true hope. Jesus is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1)! He is our hope in every aspect of our lives. When people draw near to the Lord, they find peace and meaning in life. They have the ability to endure, even in the harshest times.

When life tumbles in, Christians find solace and comfort in the Lord. God’s prophet Jeremiah watched his world tremble and stumble when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. He wrote, “This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. The LORD’S loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I have hope in Him’” (Lamentations 3:21-24).

Oh, every day God gives us life and the things that we need to sustain life. We breathe

God's air, eat God's food, and drink God's water. God is so good to us. Even when ugly and hurtful things happen to us, God knows how to use those hurtful things for good. The Bible says, "And we know (not we think or we feel, but we know) that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). God can use our defeats and disappointments to shape and mold us, so that we become better people.

Even when God says no to our prayers, He does so for our best interest. The Bible records when God said no to an apostle. Paul speaks, "So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded to the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He (God) said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

God sees our needs even before we do. He knows what is best for our character and what will help us spiritually. He gives us great hope by forgiving our sins. You might think there is no way God would ever forgive you of all your sins; but if you think that, you'd be mistaken. Before Paul was an apostle of Christ, he was the persecutor, Saul of Tarsus. By inspiration he wrote, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16). If the blood of Christ could wash away the sins of the worst sinner of all, it'll also wash away your sins.

You can go to heaven, no matter how many sins you've committed, because of the grace of our God and how it is greater than our sins; and the Lord gives us the opportunity and the ability to change. This change is repentance, and repentance is an opportunity full of hope. You don't have to be stuck in your old life. The Lord can help you turn your life around. This ability to change comes from our faith in the Lord and His teaching through the Word, the Bible. The more we read and understand about the Lord, the more we'll love Him. This love for God in our hearts gives us strength to make lasting changes.

God can break us free from enslavement to sin. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Enslavement to sin kills hope and has filled our prisons and our cemeteries, but the Scripture says more. The Lord also says, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." God can set us free from the enslaving hold that sin has on our lives. Hope means I do not have to be entrapped by my past sin. God can turn my life around and strengthen me to become the person that He desires.

Hope also means that this life is not all there is; that there is life beyond the grave far better than our lives here. The Lord Jesus promised, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). We not only can live eternally, we can live in heaven with Jesus. In heaven, we can have His blessing and comfort forever.

The Scripture says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5). Wouldn’t you like to be in a place that is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away? Wouldn’t you like to be in a place without disease, death, weeping, or sin? Wouldn’t you like to live forever in the presence of God and Christ who love you?

Some people think it’s impossible to be a Christian and live a holy life, but the Lord Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Friend, you can go to heaven; you can bear the easy yoke of Christ and bear His light burden. Christianity is a livable faith. But you must take up that yoke and follow Christ with faith and love.

Why does all this matter? It matters, because our hope is not dead. It’s alive and well! We have hope in Christ because of the cross, and we have hope in Christ because of the resurrection. We don’t have to die in sin; we can live eternally. Christ paid the price for our sins. We don’t serve a dead Lord but a risen one who lives forever! Because He lives, we have the hope of living with Him in heaven forever and ever. There is a big difference between those who belong to Christ and those who do not. Don’t you want to belong to Jesus? Let’s pray together. O, Father, help each of us to place our hope firmly in You, and in Your Son Jesus, who died for our sins, and whom You raised from the dead. Father may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Can you imagine how empty and sad life is without hope? Some scoff at God, and others deny He exists. Those who belong to Christ greatly differ from those who don’t. Paul reminded the Ephesian pagans of their past before they became Christians. Paul said, “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Oh, I tell you, God is no crutch, as some think. God is your only real hope. He is your Creator; He sustains your life; and His Son is your only Savior. Without Him, you have no hope! But with Christ, “you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household (or family)” (Ephesians 2:19).

As I have said, those who belong to Christ greatly differ from those who don’t. That’s why it matters whether you are right with the Lord and whether your sins are forgiven. Is your life right with God? Have you been washed in the blood of Christ? You’re washed in the blood when you put your faith in Christ, lovingly repent of your sins, confess the name of the Lord, and are baptized into Christ. In the act of baptism, God washes away your sins and adds you to His family, the church. When you have the hope of God in your life, because He’s washed away your sins and added your name to the book of life, you can have confidence to face every trouble and trial life hands you. In Christ, the Father will hear your prayers. With God’s book, the Bible, you have the Divine truth. Wouldn’t you like to have your sins forgiven today? Why not place your hope in Christ today by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins?

A Friend to Jesus

Everyone needs a friend, and the best friend you'll ever have is Jesus Christ. Today, we're exploring the friendship we have with Jesus. We go to God's Word, because we know God is our friend. He loves us fully and freely. His love is greater than we can imagine. Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" Few treasures in life exceed the value of friendship. Heaven is beautiful, not only because God made it so, but more because of who will be there. The Lord yearns to be our friend, now and forever. I know you're thankful for His love. Someone said, "A friend is one who knows all about you and still likes you." The Lord Jesus went to the cross for sinners. He gave His love freely to people who didn't deserve His love. Yes, He knows all our sins and our weaknesses. He knows our thoughts, good and evil. He knows all our secrets. In spite of it all, He created us and gave Jesus to save us from sin. He loved us as sinners, but wanted to provide something better for us than the pleasures of sin.

The more we get to know God, the more we love Him. The more we love Him, the more we want to serve Him. The more we serve Him, the more abundant our lives become. Friendship with Jesus is the greatest blessing of life. Let's explore friendship with the Lord.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to John chapter 21:15-17. Jesus is having a conversation with Peter. "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said it to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" Love is not just about saying we love someone, but also living it out in our lives.

Throughout His days, Jesus faced people who wanted to take His life and end His ministry. Matthew chapter two tells how Herod tried to kill Jesus as an infant after the wise men inquired about the birth of the king of the Jews. Sadly, Herod did kill many infants in Bethlehem, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy that Rachel would weep for her children. Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, is buried in Bethlehem; you can visit her tomb even to this day.

The New Testament tells of Jesus coming to His hometown of Nazareth to preach. The Lord taught things they didn't wish to hear. They had a hard time believing a hometown boy could be the Messiah. Luke 4:28-29 says, "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and they drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of a hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff." Jesus was able to escape, but you can imagine His heartbreak and disappointment over the loss of His lifetime friends at Nazareth.

John chapter eight tells of the experience Jesus had in Jerusalem in the temple as He defended Himself before the Jews. Jesus spoke of Abraham's rejoicing to see His day. John 8:57-59 says, "So the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' So

they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.”

Again, in chapter ten of John, Jesus revealed to the Jews that He and the Father are one. But this didn't set well with the Jews. They thought He was blaspheming by claiming to be the Son of God. So John 10:31 says, “The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.”

John chapter eleven tells how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. When the report of this miracle reached the ears of the Pharisees and chief priests, they convened a council. They said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:47-49). Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said it would be better for one man to die than for the whole nation. So, from that day on they made plans to put Jesus to death. Matthew 26:4 says they plotted together to arrest Jesus by stealth and to kill Him.

The disciple, Judas Iscariot, whom Jesus named an apostle and entrusted the moneybox, became greedy and was a thief. Matthew 26:14-16 says, “Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?’ And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.” Judas led the mob who brought swords and clubs to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus frequently prayed. Judas had even agreed with the Jews on a sign. He said “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” The Bible says, “And he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And he kissed Him” (Matthew 26:49). Ah, this kiss must have broken the Lord's heart. It was cruel and selfish. There was no love to be found in that kiss. They bound the hands of Jesus and they led Him away.

During His trials and crucifixion, they humiliated Him; they mocked Him falsely; they accused Him, slapped Him, scourged Him; and they forced Him to carry His own cross. Pontius Pilate found no fault in Him worthy of death, so he tried to find a way to free Jesus by offering to release a prisoner the Jews wanted. The people refused to free Jesus and cried for Barabbas.

When Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus who is called the Christ, the people showed no mercy on Jesus. Matthew 27:22-23 reveals that they all said, “‘Let Him be crucified!’ And Pilate said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let Him be crucified!’” Though Pilate washed his hands of this matter in front of the crowd, the people said, “His blood be on us and on our children!” These bloodthirsty people callously called for the death of an innocent man because they were envious and they were afraid of what Rome might do.

So, they led Jesus away to Golgotha, and there they crucified Him. While suffering on the cross, His enemies showed no mercy. They were not content just to do away with Him; they had to humiliate and slander Him as well. The Bible says, “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you're the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ‘He saved others; He cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we'll believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way” (Matthew 27:39-44).

Jesus endured terrifying physical pain on the cross; but when the crowds watching added insult to injury, it must have pierced his heart. Jesus could see a bigger picture. He went to the cross to save the very sinners who put Him there. The Lord endured evil against Himself without becoming ugly to others.

The Bible says, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He didn't revile in return; when He suffered, He didn't threaten, but He continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Jesus blesses us and blesses all, even when people do their worst to Him. He bore our sins, so that we might leave an old life of sin to live to righteousness. The Lord so befriended us that He opened the way for us to have a new and better life, filled with faith, hope, and love. The Lord Jesus does not leave people where He found them. He heals what is broken in our lives. He lifts up those who are down. He forgives our sins. He gives us hope that we can leave old habits of which we're ashamed and can have new lives filled with love and righteousness.

No one, I say to you, no one will ever be a better friend to you than Jesus Christ. Proverbs 17:17 says that a friend loves at all times. The Lord loves you for who you are and who you will become. Remember, God sees what we can become with His grace and help. By His grace, He forgives our past, helps us day to day, and guides us to an eternal home in the future. His love helps us every step of the way.

Christianity is friendship, friendship with God and with everyone who loves God. The New Testament describes Jesus as the "friend of sinners" in Matthew 11:19. Jesus called His disciples "friends" (Luke 12:4 and John 15:14). He wants everyone to stand with Him not against Him. He wants their friendship to be real, to be strong, and to last forever. He wants more than to just be an acquaintance or fair-weather friend. He wants people who will pledge their faith and loyalty to Him.

The Lord Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13-14). Then He said, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Jesus was willing to die for you to save and bless you. Do you really think He would do anything to hurt you or to lead you astray? He asks that you befriend him by being obedient to His commands. The Lord wants you to obey Him because you love Him. But the Lord is not being overbearing or cruel to us when He asks us to obey Him.

The Lord is not trying to enslave us with His commands. This is crucial. Some hear the word command and they get the wrong idea. The Lord never gives us a command to hurt us, to manipulate us, or to subdue us. God's commandments don't enslave; they set us free. Some people don't like following the rules or being told what to do. Our Father in Heaven is indeed a loving Father to us. He gives us His commands because He knows that His instructions will bless our lives and keep us from hurting ourselves.

Every commandment, in the Word, leads to blessing. Every commandment helps us to avoid the pitfalls of life. Every commandment keeps us on the straight and narrow road that leads to an abundant life. Love leads us to do what is right, what is best, and what brings a blessing to all. The commandments of Jesus are designed to teach us how to do just that! The

more we walk in the Lord's way, the more we see how God was loving us through His commandments. God's commandments are God's gift to us.

In the Old Testament, Moses reminded Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land, "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:7-8). If that were true of the Law of Moses, how much more true is it of the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament? We have a great God who has blessed us with the way of righteousness. Oh, what a wonderful gift!

The Lord has also blessed us with a spiritual family, the church, who are friends. The little epistle of Third John ends with the words, "The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name." The Lord has blessed me with the opportunity to travel all over this country and into other countries to meet my brothers and sisters in Christ. Because of Christ, they are my brethren and also my friends.

The Bible calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Friendship means that we care about others personally, sharing their joys and their pains. We take care of each other. Being a friend to Jesus means being a friend to His church and all the people who are in it. They are indeed family.

Being a friend to Jesus means that we'll take our stand with Him. We believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We pledge our lives to serve Him and Him alone. We lovingly, respectfully but firmly stand up for His teaching and for His teaching alone and for His morals. To be a friend to the Lord Jesus means we trust Him fully and freely. What He calls sin, we recognize as evil. What He calls false, we recognize as wrong. Friendship with Jesus calls us to serve Him, to preach the gospel, and to sacrifice ourselves. Oh, we do this with love, and joy and thankfulness for the opportunity. Are you a friend of Jesus?

As the Gospel of John closes, the Lord Jesus has his first personal conversation with Peter after the resurrection. Only days before, Peter had denied the Lord three times. "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to Him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep'" (John 21:15-17).

I've wondered if the Lord Jesus might ask that question to you or to me today, "Do you love me?" or "Do you love me more than these?" Friend, how would you answer? Can you say that you have been faithful to the Lord, that you're attending church faithfully, you're reading your Bible, you're praying daily, and you stand up for what is true and right? Are you a friend to Jesus? To become a friend to Jesus, the Lord said we should obey His commandments. You must believe; without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Then you must turn from everything sinful and offensive to Jesus and turn to what is right and pleases the Lord. That's repentance. Confessing Jesus as the Son of God is also necessary and being baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins is also necessary just as the Bible teaches in Acts 2:38.