

Program Transcripts

For November 2020



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

November 2020

Topics subject to change without notice

NOVEMBER 1 – CITIZENSHIP AS CHRISTIANS

When it's time to elect government officials, should Christians get involved? Does the Bible have anything to say to the Christian citizen? In this lesson we're going to examine how a Christian citizen responds to his nation.

NOVEMBER 8 – WHY I AM A MEMBER

If I ask you to do something that is life-changing, I should have a really good reason. Today we're exploring why everyone should be a member of the Lord's glorious church. There is no greater privilege!

NOVEMBER 15 – MEANT FOR GOOD

Heartaches come to all of us, and we wonder how God fits in all this. God is just and His purpose is good, even when we don't understand why. We're exploring how God uses our heartaches for good.

NOVEMBER 22 – GIVE THANKS

The last Thursday of every November has been designated as a day to give thanks in our nation. There are many good reasons and benefits to giving thanks. Giving thanks is at the heart of all things Christian.

NOVEMBER 29 – WALKING BY FAITH

Paul said, "We walk by faith and not by sight." What does he mean? Is our faith just a leap in the dark or is there more involved? Do Christians have good reasons for trusting in God and living for Jesus?

Citizenship as Christians

When it's time to elect government officials, should Christians get involved? Does the Bible have anything to say to the Christian citizen? God reveals Himself and His will for our lives through His written Word. The Bible tells us of God's love and His plan for redeeming man. It reveals what's good and what's evil. God's Word reveals what will bless us and what will hurt us. The Bible teaches us the truth, and that truth gives us hope and purpose. The Bible is more than an ancient book; it lives and it speaks to every aspect of our lives. We need the Bible, because we need God's wisdom and His guidance. That's why we study.

The founding fathers of the United States recognized God's role in establishing and providing the prosperity of this country. George Washington, said, "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of Providential agency."

Can we suppose this nation with all its struggles has outgrown the need for God's help? Can we have peace and security while we reject the morals of the Lord? Do we imagine that we can prosper while we ignore the Source of all blessings? Can we assume that we have justice while we reject the teaching of the God of all righteousness? When nations forget the Lord and live by human standards, they deprive themselves of the blessing and the righteousness that the Lord's way provides. Pushing God out of our lives is a disastrous decision. William Penn wrote in 1681, "If you are not governed by God, you will be ruled by tyrants."

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter 2:13-17. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan." We shouldn't imagine that all people are alike. There's an important difference between one who sets his heart to live right but sometimes does evil and one who sets his heart on evil but sometimes does what is right. Wicked rulers destroy cities and nations, while righteous rulers bless them. Wicked people are not content simply to be wicked; they want everyone else to join them in their wickedness. Psalm 125:3 says, "For the wicked shall not rule the godly, lest the godly be forced to do wrong."

When wicked people rule, they open the door for all kinds of evil. Corrupt rulers abuse their power by making laws that oppress the righteous and use public funds to do things that no righteous person could approve. How can anyone who loves what is good support rulers who make laws promoting evil? If I believe a practice is morally wrong, I will not support legalizing that practice. If I believe a practice is morally wrong, I won't vote for or use my influence to support a candidate that will do what God says is evil. If I support an ungodly candidate, I'm giving my consent to his ungodly ways. How can I love God and support what is sinful? How can I hunger for righteousness and then support wickedness?

True Christians belong to the Lord. They belong to Him in every aspect of their lives. It's inconceivable that a Christian citizen could vote for someone who supports a platform that

contradicts the moral values that they hold. If we elect people who have no regard for God, we'll have to live with their ungodly decisions and ways. Tertullian encouraged the Christian minority in the pagan Roman Empire of the second century to be the "soul" of their culture. God needs Christians today to be the soul and conscience of our culture. We can bring about moral change if we're willing to speak out against evil. The best way to defeat the devil is to expose his wickedness. Christians have too often retreated into silence and let evil go unchallenged.

Edmund Burke, the 18th century politician said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Many Christians have so silenced their voices that all one can hear is the ungodly calling for more ungodliness. We are fast destroying ourselves by letting the ungodly go unchallenged. We don't speak this way out of hate for anyone but out of love for God, love for our children, and love for our neighbors. It's not bigoted to hunger for righteousness; it's not bigoted to love the truth. It's patriotic to want what is right and good.

Have we forgotten God is the Judge of all nations? Every nation is accountable to Him. The Lord said, "'Can I (God is speaking) not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?' declares the LORD. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it'" (Jeremiah 18:6-10).

The Lord has witnessed our country's ungodly disrespect for the sanctity of life, for the sanctity of marriage, and the sanctity of moral purity. Our language has become profane, and our nation is filled with the children of unmarried parents. The more we push God and His way out, the more empty, and hopeless, and depraved we become. God's Word still says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Our national sins are disgraceful, and we have no shame. We've forgotten how to blush, and our consciences have become hardened.

God's grace should motivate us to live godly and righteous lives, not remove all standards of Christian morality. Titus 2:11-12 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." Should we not be so thankful for what Jesus did on the cross for us that we would turn from sin?

Today, our laws allow some evil practices to fill this land. We no longer value the sanctity of life or the sanctity of marriage, as defined in God's Holy Word. We've replaced these with human values that are destined to corrupt the morality of our homes. We've made being tolerant of everything, whether it's good or evil, into some form of virtue. In tolerating evil, our society has simply become more evil, and it's become more intolerant of God and what He teaches. Many have become intolerant of God's values found in the Word of God. They won't tolerate God's regard for the unborn as viable persons. God speaks of the unborn as people in Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1; and Galatians 1. Nor will they tolerate 1 Corinthians 7:2 that says every man should have his own female wife, and every woman should have her own male husband.

Many live today as they did in the days of the Judges of Israel. Judges 21:25 says, "In those

days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Today, people have pushed God out of their thinking and live by their own standards. Believing we can live by our own rules is popular, but it’s also destructive morally and spiritually. If what people think determines right and wrong, then truth, peace, and morality are lost in confusion.

Human reason, left to follow its own path, leads society to do unspeakably horrible things. Wicked men will find ways to excuse and justify themselves with every evil desire and every sin. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” Some people demand the freedom to do as they please, and they don’t care who they hurt. When evil men with no conscience or fear of God rule in society, they will lead people away from hope and from righteousness.

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” God’s prophet Jeremiah wrote, “I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it’s not in man who walks to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). We need God’s wisdom and guidance. People may think they’re wise enough to choose their own way; but any path without God will inevitably end in ruin. People who refuse God’s wisdom hurt themselves and they hurt their children.

God said through the prophet Hosea, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6). When we turn against God, we rob our children of the opportunity to know God, to know His holiness, and His righteousness. We leave them in spiritual darkness.

The books of Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament provide a commentary on the spiritual lives of the kings of Israel and Judah for hundreds of years. God tied the prosperity of that nation directly to the devotion of the king and the people. When the king and the people followed God, God prospered them. When the king and the people defied God, they brought hardships and captivity upon themselves. If we, today, push God out of our lives, how can we think God will bless us? How can we imagine that God will prosper us?

Character and devotion to God matter in our leaders. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, and priest of Midian, gave Moses some valuable advice. Moses was wearing himself out with his duties and needed help to govern the people. Jethro instructed him to “look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens” (Exodus 18:21). Jethro knew that Moses would need men of good character to govern the people. These men had to be people that others would respect and follow. They must “fear God.” Fearing God meant that they took God and His laws seriously. They drew their sense of right and wrong from God, not from opinion polls. These men of integrity refused to be bought with bribes. Moses needed such men to help him govern the people justly and honestly. We still need capable officials today who fear God and have integrity.

Proverbs 25:19 says, “Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.” We’ve all been disappointed by corrupt officials who’ve brought shame to our cities, states, and nation. You can’t count on a man of low character. A man who shows low character in private will have low character in public. The Lord Jesus said, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much” (Luke 16:10).

Some say a godly man or a Christian should never serve in the government. Joseph served as second to Pharaoh, and David served as King of Israel. God used Moses to lead His people out of bondage and to build a new nation. The Ten Commandments are both religious and social laws on which the nation of Israel was founded. Ezra was a Jew in the Persian government and Nehemiah served as an authority for the king to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Daniel as a ruler over the whole province of Babylon and a chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel also served as a commissioner to King Darius of all Persia. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Darius were pagan kings, but Daniel lived a righteous life and was respected for his faith. Queen Esther laid her life on the line to influence King Ahasuerus of Persia, who reigned from India to Ethiopia. Paul mentions Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth, in Romans 16:23. So, godly people through the years have served as public officials.

The Old Testament prophets called nations and cities to repent of their wickedness. When people refused God and abused their fellow-citizens, God noticed and He punished the wicked. God said through Amos, "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). Oh, we need to turn away from evil and turn to righteousness!

Why does all this matter? When people vote and support the wicked, they're actually taking a stand against God. Second Chronicles 18 tells how a good king, Jehoshaphat, made an alliance with a wicked king, Ahab, in fighting an enemy. God sent a prophet who said, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD and so bring wrath on yourself from the LORD?" (2 Chronicles 19:2).

If I vote and support an evil person who won't stand against sin, haven't I also said by my actions that I won't stand against sin? If I don't cast my vote for god-fearing people, wicked ones will take office. My failure to vote for what is right may allow a wicked person to rule. "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Some Christians don't vote because they believe their vote won't make any difference. But in 1839, one vote elected Marcus Morton governor of Massachusetts. In 1868, one vote saved President Andrew Johnson from impeachment. In 1876, one vote gave Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency of the United States. In 1923, one vote gave Adolph Hitler the leadership of the Nazi party. I tell you, one vote can matter greatly. We must exercise our privileges wisely to support what is right and good. We must let our lights shine through wise and godly choices. We have the privilege to choose godly leaders. Let's use that privilege.

Christians are first and foremost citizens of heaven. We owe our allegiance to the Lord Jesus. Philippians 3:20-21 says, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Citizenship in heaven is a privilege and a blessing; we must not take it lightly. The best decision that you'll ever make is to follow Jesus Christ. Do it today!

To become a citizen of heaven, believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart. Repent of your sins; you can't walk with God and the devil at the same time. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Confession is a public declaration of your decision to follow Jesus. And be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water. It's the time that we have our sins washed away and become a Christian. When we're baptized, the Lord adds us to His church; He makes us His child. Everyone needs to be a citizen of heaven. Don't wait another day! Come to the Lord.

Why I Am a Member

If I ask you to do something really important, I should have a reason. Today I want to tell you why I am a member of the church of Christ. Proverbs 30:5 says, “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” This Bible is certainly true, because God is true and trustworthy. I’ve spent my whole adult life studying the word of God, and I’ve found it to prove true in every instance. You never have to doubt God’s Word because God’s character, God’s honesty, God’s integrity, and God’s wisdom are abundantly found in the words that He gave us.

Following Christ means becoming a member of the church that He built. You’ll never make a more important decision than the one to follow the Lord Jesus. Following Him brings great blessing, but it also has great challenges. We must deny ourselves; have you ever denied yourself anything? We must take up our crosses daily and follow Him; are you willing? We must offer our bodies a living sacrifice. We must love the Lord more than anything else; do you? When I ask you to become a member of the Lord’s church, I’m challenging you to put God first in everything and give Him your utmost loyalty and service.

I realize how serious this challenge is, so I’m prepared to also tell you why I’ve chosen to follow Jesus and to become a member of His church. To follow Jesus means being involved in His church, that is His family, His kingdom, and His vineyard. You can’t separate the church from Jesus or Jesus from the church. To embrace one is to embrace the other. There is no other way.

Our reading today comes from the book of Acts 2:38-41. “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

People ask, “Why are you asking us to be members of the church of Christ?” I’d like to give you five reasons, reasons that matter!

First, I’m a member because Jesus loves the church and died for the church. His attitude should shape our attitudes. Ephesians 5:25-30 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.”

The New Testament describes the church as God’s family. First Timothy 3:15 says, “but in case I’m delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” Jesus Himself looks at the church as His own family. The Lord Jesus asked, “‘Who are My mother and My brothers?’ And looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother

and sister and mother’” (Mark 3:33-35). Jesus regards the church as His family. I want to be in that family.

Second, I’m a member of the church of Christ, because Jesus is my Lord and I serve Him. Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. Only Jesus will judge me on the last day. Only Jesus can be my Savior. Only Jesus can forgive my sins. If I want Jesus to be my Savior, I must also accept Him as my Lord. I must follow Him. How can I think that I’m following Him, when I’m not willing to be part of the church that He built and purchased with His own blood? The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). The only way to the Father, to heaven, is through Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 says, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” We must follow Him.

The Lord expects His people to be wise and loving. According to Matthew 7:24 a wise person is one who hears His words and does them, that is the words. The foolish person hears the words but does not do them. I want the Lord Jesus to count me as wise! The idea that we can do as we please and not do what the Lord says and yet still be thought of as a faithful Christian is mistaken. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matthew 7:21). Again He asked, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). If the congregation that you attend isn’t following the words of the Lord, my friend you’re putting your soul at risk.

The Lord Jesus expects His people to obey Him as Lord! Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Obedience is how we love the Lord Jesus! Jesus obeyed His Father out of love and He wants us to obey out of love too! The Lord Jesus explained, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:9-10). I want to abide in God’s love and favor. To do that means I must follow the example of the Lord Jesus by keeping His commandments.

This is why, in churches of Christ, we immerse penitent believers for the forgiveness of their sins, just like we read in Acts 2:38, and we do this rather than sprinkle infants who don’t even know what’s happening. This is why, in churches of Christ, we sing a cappella as a congregation rather than have choirs and use instruments of music. This is why we, as churches of Christ, have a plurality of elders as our leaders rather than a pastor system or a single bishop. This is why we, as churches of Christ, observe the Lord’s Supper each Lord’s Day. This is why we give cheerfully and freely as we’ve been prospered. This is why we go into all the world with the pure gospel that’s in the Word of God and we teach people all that the Lord has commanded us. This is why, in churches of Christ, we help the needy, live godly lives, tell the truth, and love all people. This is why we cannot pretend sin is okay, why we say false doctrine is not as good as the truth, why we say that repentance is necessary, and why we say that morality doesn’t depend on the situation but depends on what God has said.

Third, I’m a member of the church of Christ because the Lord adds the saved to His church. I love the church; it’s filled with people who love the Lord and love and care for each other. I want to be around people who have strong faith and strong love for God. When

people obey the gospel and are saved, the Lord adds them to the church. Acts 2:41 says, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” Verse 47 says, “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” The phrase “their number” is a reference to the “church.”

The Lord knew that we would need a family on earth to help us, to teach us, and to keep us strong in the faith. Paul said, “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another” (Romans 15:14). We need the strength of each other’s faith to keep us spiritually involved. We also need each other when we fall and fail. Galatians 6:1-2 says, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, you restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” We need to do that.

The love of Christ and the grace of God makes us all better. Worshipping at church with other saints, and fellowshiping with brothers and sisters, and having Bible study, all of this enriches our lives and shapes us into people who live godly lives and love each other. We need each other. First Peter 2:9-10 describes who we are as Christians and members of the church, and I want to be around people like that. He says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” The church provides the basis for the world to know the Lord and to know the gospel message of salvation. We need the church.

Fourth, I’m a member because being “in Christ” means being in His body, the church. Galatians 3:26-27 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” When I was baptized into Christ, I entered into a relationship with Him that I didn’t have before. God counted me as His child and made me an heir of eternal life along with His Son Jesus. As a child of God, born again in baptism, I was privileged to enter the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). What is this birth of water and spirit? It’s baptism. What is the kingdom of God? It’s the church, the body of Christ! First Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

The Scriptures clearly teach that baptism is the time that we enter the body of Christ. We know the body of Christ is the church, because the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 1:22-23, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

To be a child of God, to be in the body of Christ, means the Lord added me to His church. If I’m not in the church, I’m not “in Christ.” If I’m not “in Christ,” I have no promise and no hope. Ephesians 2:12 describes the condition of people who are not Christians, “remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Separate from Christ, excluded, strangers to promise, having no hope and without God! There is a big huge difference between being “in Christ” and being “outside of Christ.”

According to Ephesians 2:1, those who are outside of Christ are dead in their trespasses and sins.

Ephesians 2:19 describes what it means to be “in Christ”: “So then you’re no longer strangers and aliens, but you’re fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.” If you are in Christ and His church, you’re in God’s family, a fellow citizen with the saints! God doesn’t exclude you as a stranger or alien anymore! Oh, I love the promise of Ephesians 1:3, which says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” We have hope in Christ! We have promise in Christ! I don’t want anyone to miss out on these blessings. That’s why I want you to become a member of the Lord’s church.

Fifth, I’m a member of the church of Christ because membership means being a citizen of heaven. If I want to go to the heavenly kingdom, I must enter God’s earthly kingdom, the church. Philippians 3:20-21 says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” Consider what a blessing it is to be a citizen of heaven!

More than anything, I want to go to heaven. First Peter 1:3-5 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Yes, I want to go to heaven! The way to heaven is through Jesus Christ and the church that He built and purchased with His own blood!

The grace of God matters! I wouldn’t want to live one day outside the grace of God, not even one hour, not one minute, and not even one second without the promises of God! I know that to abide in His grace and love I must be a member of His family, the church. I wish everyone were a member of the church that Jesus built. I wish everyone were willing to deny themselves and to take up their crosses daily and follow Christ. I want everyone to know the Lord and to place their trust in Him. Please don’t think you can please the Lord Jesus and at the same time reject His church. You can’t have one without the other.

When you give your heart and your life to Christ in obedience to the gospel, the Lord will add you to His church. That’s the only way that you can enter the Lord’s church; the Lord must add you. He will add you when you place your trust in Him, firmly believing in Him and His teaching. Believing the gospel means believing in His death on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection. It means believing that you’re accountable to Him and that He will one day come again from heaven to judge the world. Your faith in Christ means you must change your heart to turn away from sin and turn to righteousness; that’s repentance. It means you’ll have to deny yourself so you can take up your cross daily to follow Jesus.

When faith, and love, and repentance unite, it will move you to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized into Christ. When you’re baptized the Lord will wash away your sins, He’ll cause you to be born again, and add you to His church. You’ll enter the kingdom of heaven and clothe yourself with Christ. God will consider you as one of His children. Baptism is the time that God acts upon you and makes you one of His own. Oh, I hope and pray that you will be baptized and become a member of the Lord’s church today.

Meant for Good

Heartaches come to all of us, and we wonder how God fits in all this. God is just and His purpose is good, even when we don't understand why. Today we're exploring how God uses our heartaches for good. The Scriptures tell us all that we need to know to be saved and to live righteously. They reveal God's grace and love, how God watches over us and helps us through the struggles and disappointments of life. God is good and He will not put more on us than we can bear. God often uses things we consider harsh to bring about good. Even when we don't understand, we can trust God.

When Joseph was just seventeen years old, his father loved him more than his brothers and made him a coat of many colors. Joseph made a bad report about his brothers, and his brothers hated him and couldn't speak peaceably to him. God revealed to Joseph some miraculous dreams that showed Joseph in an exalted position and his brothers and parents bowing down to him. These dreams led his brothers to hate Joseph even more. They wanted to kill Joseph; but due to Reuben's interference the brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Joseph served Potiphar until Potiphar's scheming wife falsely charged him with trying to rape her. Potiphar punished Joseph by placing him in Pharaoh's prison. The hand of the Lord was always with Joseph, and God put him next to Pharaoh in order to save Israel during the famine. Even in the harshest times, God never forsook Joseph.

When their father Jacob died the brothers worried Joseph might take vengeance on them. But Joseph spoke kindly to his brothers. He explained, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). What the brothers meant for evil, God meant for good. God works His good purpose, even when men are at their worst.

Our reading today comes from one of the most beloved Psalms of all time, Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Evil and painful things happen to all of us, and we don't always know the reasons why. Why do the young die? Why are there earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes? Why do the evil men rule over nations? If God is completely good and all powerful, why does He allow suffering? Is there some reason why all these bad things happen? It's not what we know that causes us the greatest sorrow; it's what we don't know.

God sees what we cannot see and He knows what we cannot know. Some things He reveals in His Word, but other things are secret. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all

the words of this law.” God reveals what is good for us and what we need in order to do His will, but He doesn’t explain everything to us.

Just because we don’t know God’s purpose for allowing some hurtful event doesn’t mean that there isn’t one. We’re limited in knowledge, but we may understand many things in the future that we can’t see in the present. For instance, we didn’t understand much of what took place in our childhood until we became parents and had children of our own. Our parents didn’t explain everything. We couldn’t understand everything, even if they had explained. Later in life we learned that our strict, rule-making parents loved and cared for us far more than we imagined. We can comprehend many things today that we couldn’t explain earlier. Loving parents discipline their children, because they can see what their children can’t see. So it is with God.

Hebrews 12:10-11 says of our earthly parents, “For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he [that is, God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We can see that later in life, when the discipline we received early in life became a great blessing for us, but not until later. Because they disciplined us, we learned to discipline ourselves.

When God disciplines us we should understand it positively and not negatively. Hebrews 12:5-7 says, “‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the lord, nor faint when you are reproved by him; for those whom the lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” God doesn’t discipline us because He’s evil or wants to hurt us; He disciplines us to strengthen our character so we might endure.

God can see down the road much farther than we can, and He often allows today’s struggles to happen in order to prepare us for the future. David faced a lion and a bear before he faced Goliath. Joseph managed a household and a prison before he managed Egypt. The struggle that you face today may be preparing you for some greater task tomorrow. Paul confidently told the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 6, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” God is indeed working in our lives and through our lives to bring to completion what He wills.

Paul later urges the church, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). Whatever God does, He does to bring about what is good and right. When we serve God’s good pleasure, we know that it leads to our eternal good.

Not everything that happens to us is good. We’ve all had our heartaches and disappointments. We’ve all faced callous people who unjustly abused us. God has this amazing ability to turn what is painful at one point in our lives into something that blesses us at another point. The apostle Paul endured as much abuse as any Christian in ancient times, but never once does he engage in a pity party or entertain the notion that God doesn’t love him. Paul said, “And 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). Paul spoke this at a time when he knew many Christians would suffer and Rome would bring charges against the church.

God causes all things, good and bad, to work together for good. God uses even our heartaches to bring some good blessing. We may not know what or how or when, but we know God can cause good.

We know this by faith, because we know the God who makes the promise keeps the promise. Paul denied that their suffering separated them from the love or the blessing of God.

Paul said, “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’re 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 8:35-39).

Far from separating us from the love of God, suffering may lead us to a greater love for God. Paul gives us a little insight into how God uses our struggles and heartaches to bless us. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5). Christian suffering produces the ability to endure, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. Suffering is the means by which we mature in our faith and love for God. Suffering may not be pleasant, but it is for our eternal good. It provides a necessary training ground to build us up.

First Peter 5:8-10 says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you’ve suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” God permits suffering, but He’s also the God of all grace who both tests and restores us.

We all face suffering, but we don’t all react to suffering the same way. No one likes to suffer, but how we react to it determines our relationship with God. Some learn love and compassion from their suffering, while others harden their hearts or become bitter. We can’t always control what happens to us, but we can choose how we will respond to what happens. James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” That struggle or heartache that you face may be just the test that matures you in Christ and equips you for greater service. God may be blessing you through this struggle. Consider what God is doing for you and in you as something joyful. See the good.

God may be fitting you for a service to bless the lives of many. Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and that God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). We all need someone who has “been there” to help us through our struggles. Your heartache and God’s comfort may be equipping you to help others who’re going through the same heartache that you’re facing. You understand your heartache in ways that others don’t, and that understanding helps to comfort others in their affliction. You can let your pain make you bitter or make you better; which will it be.

Can God be both loving and yet permit suffering? How can a loving Father permit suffering? Many people assume that love and suffering are mutually exclusive. That if God permits suffering, some assume that God could not possibly love us. We have to pause here and ask, “What if that

suffering demonstrates love? What if someone chooses to suffer in order to demonstrate his love?" What if a loving person in order to achieve good for others is willing to suffer? What if loving people are willing to sacrifice now in order to bring about something better in the future?

Suffering is not simply a human matter; God also knows what it means to suffer. The God who permits us to suffer also permitted His Son to suffer. Jesus was willing to suffer the cross as a means to show His love. On the cross He demonstrated His love for His Father. Speaking of His death on the cross Jesus said, "so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me" (John 14:31). Jesus earnestly prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus despised the shame of the cross but was willing to endure the suffering and fulfill the will of the Father because He loved the Father.

God our Father loved mankind enough to sacrifice His Son Jesus, so that He could atone for our sins. God said through the prophet, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall upon Him" (Isaiah 53:5-6). God sent His Son to this earth to sacrifice Himself, so that He might bear the punishment for our sins and we might be forgiven. By His scourging we are healed. He took the chastening for our well-being.

Love acts and sacrifices out of a determination to do what is best for somebody else. Real love includes sacrifice and puts the needs of others before its own needs and desires. Far from being mutually exclusive, true love always has some measure of sacrifice or suffering! A loving person is willing to give of himself in order to provide the greater good for someone else. The Lord Jesus demonstrates His undeniable love for you in His death on the cross.

You may be going through a really rough time. Please don't give up on God; don't let your heartache make you bitter. There's hope for something better. The last chapter of your life hasn't yet been written, and there is a life to come. One day God will right every wrong, make good prevail, and dry every tear. God has a home for you in heaven, if you'll put your trust in Him and obey Him.

The apostle Paul, speaking about his troubled life wrote, "We're afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). He knew that whatever happened to him in this life could not take away the promise of God in the next life. He said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). We need the hope of Christ in our lives!

How do we get that hope? We get it through trusting and obeying the Lord. Believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart, repent and forsake your sins, confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ so that God may wash away your sins. When you're baptized the Lord will add you to His church and make you His child. Christ suffered greatly to bless you and to show you just how much He loves you. Show your love by serving Him.

Give Thanks

This coming Thursday, many will consider what they're thankful for. Today we're going to see how counting your blessings will make a difference in your life. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Psalm 19:9 says "The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether." Because God is good and righteous, we can turn to His word and be assured that it will teach us the truths that we most need to hear and to be His people and then also to prosper. I'm thankful that God loves us so much and blesses us every single day.

Psalm 92:1-2 says, "It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your loving kindness in the morning And Your faithfulness by night." During the Thanksgiving holiday, we remember our blessings and express our thanks to God for them. But thanks should be on our lips every day. We can never say thank you enough to family, friends, and especially to God. Thanksgiving is not just something that we do to be kind; it also blesses us. When thanksgiving becomes an integral part of your life, you'll find that your attitude and your life change. You'll become more positive, more gracious, more loving, and more humble.

We are utterly dependent upon God who created us for life. He provides all our needs. The fine-tuning of our universe which allows us to breathe, to have fresh water, to have food, and to have night and day is not an accident. God made this world for our blessing. We need to honor God for all He has done and to be thankful. The act of giving thanks leads us to healthy hearts, minds and lives. Giving thanks will also lead us to take God and His way seriously. Nothing is more important!

Our reading today comes from Psalm 100, all five verses.

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
Know that the LORD Himself is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter His gates with thanksgiving
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
For the LORD is good;
His loving kindness is everlasting
And His faithfulness to all generations.

God has always urged His people to be thankful. Paul urged the church in Colossians 4:2, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." He had already given the reason for this; it's because of what the Lord Jesus has done. He said, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude" (Colossians 2:6-7). He said walk as you were instructed and overflow with gratitude. Do this and it will make your life brighter and better. You'll be right with God and will fill your life with joy.

The Christian life should overflow with gratitude. How do we do this? Colossians 3:15-17 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Let Christ's peace be your focus, sing with thankfulness in your heart, and do

everything in His name while giving thanks. These changes will lift your spirits and encourage your heart. Your focus determines your attitude and your destiny. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Him [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”

It takes discipline to keep focusing your mind on God. Life is ever changing, distracting, and often unfair. Our changing world is declining fast in morality and faith. We may even think all is lost. We can't predict what misfortunes may lie ahead, but we can count on the blessings that we now enjoy with confidence. We can remember that we are victorious in Christ. We can be certain that we keep His promises, for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

So, we must follow God's teaching. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 he says “pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” In everything? Yes, in everything. In good times and in bad, give thanks. When life is unfair, give thanks for what you have in Christ. Even if you suffer for the name of Christ, give thanks! First Peter 4:12-14 says, “Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” The “here and now” isn't everything; the Lord will reward those who love and serve Him.

Our struggles in this life prepare us for something better, so be thankful even for struggles. James 1:2-4 counsels us, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” God is shaping and molding us for eternity, so don't despair when you face a struggle. Learn to be thankful for everything.

Why? First, when you are thankful, you'll stop complaining and grumbling. Throughout their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled against God. God counted their grumbling as a lack of trust; First Corinthians 10 regards grumbling as a sin as bad as idolatry or even immorality. Philippians 2:14-16 says, “Do all things without grumbling [complaining] or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I'll have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.” When you complain, you take your focus off of what is good that the Lord has done for you, and put it on the bad.

Second, when you're thankful, you'll stop worrying so much. Philippians 4:4-7 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing [that is, stop worrying about anything], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” When we rejoice in the Lord and take our burdens and cares to Him, He blesses us with peace. He'll put a guard around our hearts and minds! The Lord truly, truly gives us an abundant life.

Start rejoicing over the things that God has done for you, and your life will grow more positive and joyful. Proverbs 15:30 says, “Bright eyes gladden the heart; and Good news puts fat on the bones.” Count your blessings, and focus on the good, and rejoice in Christ! Put away the negative and focus on the good. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is

right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

Third, when you're thankful, you'll become more humble and less prideful. Remember God is the source of every blessing. 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.” This is why the Lord in Matthew 6:11 asks us to pray to God, “Give us this day our daily bread.” You may work a job and think it all depends on you, but remember God is the source of every blessing.

Moses reminded the Israelites as they were about to enter the promised land in Deuteronomy 8:11-14, “Beware that you don't forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” You see, pride leads to forgetfulness. So Moses urged them in verse 18, “But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” God is the source of all we possess, all we are, and all we hope to be. First Corinthians 4:7 asks some arrogant people, “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you didn't receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?”

Some folks focus on themselves, and their own abilities, and their own righteousness. When a person gives thanks to God merely for what he himself possesses within himself, he's actually bragging about himself more than he is thanking God. The Lord Jesus contrasted the arrogant person with the person who recognizes his great need for God. Luke 18:11-14 says, “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself [not to God, but too himself]: ‘God, I thank You that I'm not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Gratitude to God, our great need for God, removes our pride.

Fourth, when you're thankful, you'll be willing to be more gracious to other people. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Giving thanks for God's grace leads us to be willing to forgive other people. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Fifth, when you're thankful, you'll express your love. We're thankful the Lord Jesus willingly and lovingly sacrificed Himself upon the cross. First John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us.” Giving thanks helps us keep our focus on the Lord and on what really matters. Gratitude for what Jesus did is at really the heart of our conversion. Gratitude leads us to be committed disciples who want to please the Lord in all that we do. We can't look deeply at the cross and then walk away as if nothing matters. Our thankfulness will not let us.

Does the cross matter to you? Surprisingly, some people live as if the cross didn't matter. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, Luke 17:12-16 says, “As He entered a village, ten leprosy men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ And when He saw them, He said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they were going, they

were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, and glorified God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.”

When people fail to remember God, fail to honor Him, or thank Him, they lose sight of the blessings of living as God’s people. An ungrateful person will become apathetic and callous toward God. When people lose sight of God, they also lose sight of morality and truth. They don’t realize that when they stop honoring God, they start honoring themselves.

Romans 1:21 to 24 described the pagan Gentiles this way: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.”

Giving thanks matters. When you love God, you want to serve Him with all your heart. Psalm 50:23 says, “He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God.” Truly, giving thanks comes from our hearts and shows in our lives. Thanksgiving should lead to thanks-living. Are you thankful?

I look forward to going to heaven and seeing Jesus, my Savior and Lord. One thing I want to do is to look into His eyes and say to Him “Thank you, thank you for dying for me. Thank you for shedding your blood to cleanse me from all my terrible sins, thank you for loving me and allowing me to live with you forever.” But I don’t want to wait until I go to heaven to express my thanks to God. I can do it now by getting right with Him and by worshiping Him. I don’t want to miss a single Lord’s Day, the first day of the week, without prayer and singing and praise to Him. I don’t want to miss a single Lord’s Day without gathering around the Lord’s table to partake of the Lord’s Supper, and remembering the Lord’s body and blood which were given for me.

The word “thankful” actually comes from an old English word “think-ful.” Being thankful comes from being think-ful. When we realize how blessed we are, we should respond to the love and goodness of God. I think how often people today want and want and want from God, but never think to give their praise, and their thanks, or their hearts to Him. Have you?

Are you following Jesus and are you serving the One who loves you? God’s goodness leads us to repent and obey the gospel. If I love God and am thankful to Him for His grace, I’ll gladly follow and obey Him. God’s love makes us want to trust in Him, to repent of all our sins, to confess His name, and to be baptized into Christ. According to Romans 6:3-7, we die with Christ in baptism, we’re buried with Him in baptism, and we’re raised with Him to walk in newness of life in baptism. Romans is so true in this manner. God wants you, He wants your heart, He wants your life, and He wants your soul. So won’t you serve Him and follow Him always. Thankfulness begins when people keep the Lord Jesus in their hearts everyday and serve Him. We hope you’ll not wait another day to put your Lord on in baptism.

Walking By Faith

The apostle Paul said, “We walk by faith and not by sight.” What does he mean? Today we’re going to explore what it means to look at life through the eyes of faith. Romans 10:17 says that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” We build our faith by searching the Bible. God’s inspired Word demonstrates His holiness, His love, and His wisdom. We know the Bible is true because of its prophetic nature, its scientific foreknowledge, and its Divine character. The Bible is certainly unique in its influence, its accuracy, and its beauty. The Bible is truly God’s Holy Word.

Hebrews 11:1-2 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.” This describes the kind of faith that God desires from us. Faith is an assurance. The word “assurance” appeared in Greek business documents with the meaning “title deed.” Faith assures us that what we will receive is what we hope for. Faith is a conviction. It’s the conviction or proof of things not seen. When saints of old had this assurance and conviction, God commended them, He vouched for them.

God would give “testimony,” that they were faithful on the day of judgment. True faith is not a leap in the dark with the absence of evidence. True faith isn’t a blind optimism. It’s not a manufactured “hope so” feeling. We demonstrate or live or walk our faith by acting with a conviction based on evidence. The evidence for what we know gives us a foundation to act, even when there are things that we don’t know. Because we know God and His Word, and that they’re true, we have the assurance of what we hope for and the evidence for things not seen. What we know to be true gives us ample evidence and reason to demonstrate our faith.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to John 20:26-29. It talks about Thomas, who had shown his doubt for Jesus that He had resurrected from the dead, and had to see for himself. Then he sees Jesus.

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, and the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

Yes, there’s a blessing for those of us who can’t see Him today, but we still believe.

God sets the standard that distinguishes those who please Him from those who don’t; that standard is faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it’s impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Through the ages when people trusted God for their strength, He stood by them and blessed them.

Consider Abraham. Hebrews 11:8 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Because Abraham believed God, He willingly obeyed even when he didn’t know where God was leading him. Verse 11 says, “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.” God blessed her because of her faith.

Man thinks seeing is believing, but God says believing is seeing. Faith works quite simply: God speaks and we hear His Word. We trust Him and His Word completely and act on it. We act even when we don't fully understand what or why. We act even when things seem impossible or very frightening. We act even when acting is costly. We do this because we believe God will do what is right and what is best. We know that God will keep His promises. Faith means we trust in God's wisdom rather than our own.

Solomon said, "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 straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones" (Proverbs 3:5-8). God expects us to respect and honor what He teaches. We may imagine that we're wise and know what's best; but when acting on our own wisdom goes against the will of God, we end up hurting ourselves spiritually.

Let me illustrate from 2 Kings 5. The captain of the Syrian army, Naaman the leper, came to Elisha, the man of God, to be healed of leprosy. Elisha sent a messenger who told him to go and dip in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed. Naaman left in a rage. He explained, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" Naaman thought the prophet would make a show and cure the leper. He simply sent out a messenger. Some wise servants urged Naaman to do what the prophet urged, and Naaman did. Second Kings 5:14 says, "So he went down and he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." It wasn't until Naaman trusted and obeyed the prophet that his flesh was restored. We must learn to trust the Lord and not lean on our own understanding.

Hebrews 11:3 says, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." Because God only speaks the truth, we understand that God created the universe just as He said. Because God speaks the truth, we believe what He says. We come to understand what is true, because we know the One who said it. We know that He only speaks the truth. Titus 1:2 describes God as the God who never lies, who cannot lie. Christian faith isn't wishful thinking; it's an inner conviction based on the truthfulness of God.

What can we know about God? We know He loves us. He sent Jesus to die for our sins, so that we could live with Him forever. We know that He provides for us. Paul said, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). We know, thirdly, He hears our prayers, because He heard them many times before. The Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). We know, fourth, that God is with us. God said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). We know He'll protect us because He promised, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Time and again, I've found these promises to be true.

You can trust God in the hardest moments, because God keeps His promises. Faith isn't a fair-weather friend; God's truths are still true in every circumstance. In his last days in prison, Paul said,

“for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). Paul could place His soul in the hands of the Father, knowing the Father would take care of Him. Someone wrote:

Into Your hands, Father, into Your hands, I commit my spirit into Your hands.
All I am and have I yield to You. Your love and grace will bear me through,
For You know what's best and what I should do, So I leave my soul within Your hands.
Into Your hands, Father, into Your hands, I cast all my burdens into Your hands,
All my stress and pain I give to You. Your love and grace will bear me through,
For You know what's best and what I should do, So I cast my cares into Your hands.
Into Your hands, Father, into Your hands, I cast all my sins into Your hands,
All I've said and done I bring to You. Your love and grace will bear me through,
For You have told me what I must do, So I cast my sins into Your hands.
Into Your hands, Father, into Your hands, I commit my spirit into Your hands.
My life on earth I leave for You. Your love and grace will bear me through,
For You have a place I'm going to, So I leave my soul within Your hands.

We can trust God's Word, because the truth found in the Bible arises from the character of God Himself. God is entirely reliable, completely trustworthy, and utterly honest. So, whatever God says is truly trustworthy. Whatever God commands should be obeyed. Whatever God promises He will fulfill. Whatever God condemns, you can believe is wrong; and whatever God teaches is right. Faith is not simply believing that God can—it's knowing that God will.

You can trust God because God is always honest. Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” God doesn't tease or joke, and He means what He says. We must take God seriously at all times.

You can trust God because He loves you. Everything He says and does is for your best interest. First John 4:9-10 says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. And in this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” When we go through something painful, we want a loved one around to comfort us and help us. We trust the people that we have come to know that they love us. God is worthy of our trust.

God wants us to have an obedient faith. The Lord Jesus said, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). Some older versions use the word believe in both places, but the words are different. The phrase “does not obey” actually reflects what the passage means in the original language.

Abraham is the “father of all who believe” and he demonstrated his faith with obedience. First, Abraham believed God when he didn't know where God wanted him to go. By faith Abraham lived in the land of promise and he looked “for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Second, Abraham and Sarah obeyed when he didn't know how God would fulfill his promise. Hebrews 11:11-12 says, “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

Third, Abraham obeyed when he didn't know when God would fulfill His promise. Hebrews 11:13-16 says, "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak [such things] make it clear that they're seeking a homeland. And if they'd been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. And therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

Fourth, Abraham obeyed even when he didn't know why God gave the commandment. Hebrews 11:17-19 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."

When we believe God, we act on our faith. That's why we're speaking about these matters. "Faith keeps the man who keeps the faith." Faith keeps us as we keep it. We walk by faith. We're saved by an active faith, not a dead one. Faith, to be any good, must demonstrate itself.

The Bible says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25). Are you a doer? Are you somebody who shows his faith? Who shows what you are, and how you love the Lord? Do you serve Him? Do you walk by faith?

We need to possess more than a simple faith in the Lord; we need an obedient faith that possesses us. Many play with religion but never give themselves to the Lord. We must make the Lord the center and focus of our hearts and lives. We must recognize God's Word is true and has authority over us. Paul said, "I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Do you have that kind of faith that leads you to die to your desires and live for the Lord? Are you crucified with Christ?

Faith will lead you to forsake your sins and live righteously. If you believe, you'll confess Jesus as the Christ and be baptized. The Lord Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Believe and obey today.

Hebrews 3:12-14 warns Christians, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For if we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." Yes, you can stop believing in Christ if you allow sin to harden your heart against God. Don't be deceived by sin. Have faith; there's hope! Don't quit trusting the Lord, and don't fall away. Build up your faith and never let it go.