

"Prepare Your Heart"

What is in your heart? Do you have a heart prepared to hear what God has to say? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Do you have a heart prepared to meet God?

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1 and verse 5, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." And 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. And 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. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

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 we determine what we will or we won't do. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6 verse 21, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." 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 and verse 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 in Jeremiah 17 verses 9 and 10, that "The heart is more deceitful than all else, And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD (he says), search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." Now 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 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?"

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The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Psalm 78 verses 5 to 8, and talk about preparing our hearts.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 78, verses 5 to 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 verses 5 to 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. And 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. And that's why we trust Him and hold to His hand.

Second, we must not forget the works of God. James 1 verse 17 says, that "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." Now every blessing that we enjoy comes from our Father in heaven. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6 and verse 8, that "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Our food, clothing, housing, and all of our spiritual blessings, oh all of them come from Him. And 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. And 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. You see 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 in Matthew 20 and verse 28, that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." And though He despised the shame of the cross, He endured it for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12 and verse 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 and verse 7 says, that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Now fools despise wisdom and instruction." Again Proverbs 14 verse 15 says, "The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps." Once more Proverbs 22 verse 3 says, "The prudent sees the evil and (what he does is he) 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. I tell you 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 in Psalm 139 verses 13 and 14, "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."

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. Now 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 and verse 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 you know what, he delights in doing what is right. God said in Isaiah 1 verses 16 and 17, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good."

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 and verse 19). Now 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 our 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 them to bear fruit. Jesus explains in Luke 8 verses 11 to 15, "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."

In this parable, the seed is the gospel, and the different kinds of soils 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 a 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. Oh 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.

Now 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 in Matthew 5 and verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." 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 and verse 5).

Second, the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5 and verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." 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 in Matthew 5 and verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." 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 and verse 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, you remember the Lord God told Moses in Exodus 25 and verse 2, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise a contribution." And you remember 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.

Perhaps you recall the selfless Macedonians who 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. And he explained in 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 5, "they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." My friend, have you given yourself to the Lord?

A prepared heart gives of himself generously and cheerfully. Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 9, verses 6 and 7, "Now this I say, that he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. That each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." I tell you this is true of our money, it's true of our time, and our labors. Give of yourself to God. 1 John 4 verse 19 says, that "We love, because He first loved us."

Well 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 in 1 Chronicles 28 and verse 9, he said "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." My friend, are you seeking the Lord? Let's pray. Oh 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 will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

God said in Ezekiel 18:30 to 32, "'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.'" And 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. 2 Peter 3 and verse 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. And when we obey from the heart we leave an old way of life and begin a new one. Romans 6 verses 17 to 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. And in baptism God unites us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ according to Romans 6 verses 3 to 7 and Colossians 2 verses 12 to 13. Now 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.

We hope that today's study about the heart has caused you to think about your heart. If you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. You can also watch the SEARCH program anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

So we ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.