

# *Program Transcripts*

For November 2015



IN  
**SEARCH**  
OF THE LORD'S WAY <sup>®</sup>

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**November 2015**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **NOVEMBER 1 – WHAT ARE YOU BECOMING?**

What will your life be like in ten years? What will your character reveal about you? We are all in a state of becoming something? Are you growing closer to the Lord and are you moving away from Him?

## **NOVEMBER 8 – JESUS UNDERSTANDS**

Have you ever felt misunderstood, that no one knew what you're going through? We're happy to say there is Someone who understands our temptations trials and struggles. Because He has been there, He can help us.

## **NOVEMBER 15 – JUDGING**

Almost everyone knows the passage in Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge"; but do they know what else the New Testament says about judging others? Is it ever appropriate to judge others or to say sin is wrong?

## **NOVEMBER 22 – BE THANKFUL**

Each year our nation sets aside a day to thank God for our blessings. God has truly given us so much for which to be thankful. We would do well to count our blessings and recognize the kindness and graciousness of God.

## **NOVEMBER 29 – COME BACK TO CHURCH**

The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, because He loves people and wants them to be part of His family. When people stop attending church, they distance themselves from the family of God.

## "What Are You Becoming?"

What will your life be like in ten years? What will your character reveal about you? Today we're thinking about the future. We know the Bible is God's message for us today. It has promises and blessings for those who take time to study it. It tells us of the glory and beauty of being in heaven with God. We want you to have those blessings and enjoy those promises. We can do nothing more important, more needed, or more valuable than studying the Scriptures.

Thirty years ago I visited a remarkable man named Claire Annis. In our first visit he sparked my interest in a question he had heard, but he kept me waiting anxiously for thirty minutes before he revealed what that question was. It's a question that still, after all of these years, haunts me. Claire was a very driven man for the Lord, mailing out more than ten million gospel tracts or brochures all over the world to anyone who asked, and he did it at his own expense. These brochures reached thousands of souls and helped establish many churches. He wrote them and printed them himself out of his garage. He was a man who put the Lord first and sacrificed.

Before he told me the question, he said that this question had burned in his heart for days. I really wanted to know what that question was and I nearly begged him to tell me. He said it had only four words: "What are you becoming?" The fact is that we're all in the state of becoming something.

We can easily lose sight of what our lives are becoming. Some grow better, while others grow bitter. Some grow more loving, and some grow more selfish. What are you becoming?

Our reading today is about the mighty man Sampson who had a weakness. It comes from Judges 16:18-21. "When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.' Then the lords of the Philistines came up her, and brought the money in their hands. And she made him sleep on her knees; and called for a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair; then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. She said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. And he awoke from his sleep, and said, 'I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him, and gouged out his eyes, and they brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze chains; and he was a grinder in the prison." That's a story of a good man who became something he didn't want to be. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful for Your love, and we're thankful that You open Your heart to us even when we fail. And, Father, help us as we live our lives to become better and not worse. Father, may Your will be done in our lives each day, just as it's done in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!

Life is full of changes. Some bless us, while others challenge us. Some help us become better people, while others tear down our resistance to evil. Things rarely stay the same for long periods of time, even when there's a conscious effort to keep them the same. Changes in the things around us can and do bring changes in our hearts and sometimes our character. Some of these changes are for our good, while others not so good. Because changes take place slowly, they aren't easily perceived. People can mindlessly drift to lifestyles that they would never have chosen earlier. They slowly become what they never intended to be.

In this study, we'll look into the life of Samson, a man who underwent some drastic changes and became what he didn't want to be. Judges 16:4-19 tells the story: "After this he (Samson) loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, 'Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what

means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we'll each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.' So Delilah said to Samson, 'Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you.' Samson said to her, 'If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.' Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

"Then Delilah said to Samson, 'Behold, you've mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.' And he said to her, 'If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak like any other man.' So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

"Then Delilah said to Samson, 'Until now you've mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound.' And he said to her, 'If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.' So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

"And she said to him, 'How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you've not told me where your great strength lies.' And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. And he told her all his heart, and he said to her, 'A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.'

"When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and she called the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.' Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him."

God gave Samson the gift of strength and up until this time Samson had served God and judged Israel for twenty years. His desire for the ladies though got him into trouble. He loved Delilah, who sold him out to his enemies. She doggedly searched for the secret of his great strength to subdue him. She used her charms and whined until Samson revealed his secret. You'd think Samson would get wise to her tricks. You'd think he'd send her away and tell her nothing. Three times she said, "The Philistines are upon you"; but he didn't pay attention. Her persistence was greater than his common sense or his moral strength; she ruined him.

After his strength left him, Judges 16:20-21 says: "And she said, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' And he awoke from his sleep and said, 'I'll go out as at other times and shake myself free.'" But he didn't know that the Lord had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

Samson lost more than his hair. Samson became what he never intended to be or wanted to be. He was now blind, a prisoner, and out of favor with God. How did this happen? Sensuality had

gradually dulled his resistance to Delilah's charms, so he told her the secret. The pleasure of sin dulls our commitment to righteousness and causes us to forget God.

Samson was not like Joseph. Joseph was constantly pressed by Potiphar's wife to sin. Genesis 39:8-10 says, "But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He's not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he wouldn't listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her." Joseph resisted temptation.

Like Delilah, the devil looks for our weak spots. We must be alert and strong. First Peter 5:8-9 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." We can overcome the devil if we stay close to God like Joseph did. James 4:7-8 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

Samson had a cavalier attitude. He took for granted his physical strength and that it would always save him; but he deceived himself. God was the true source of Samson's strength. First Corinthians 10:12 reminds us, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Samson fell to sin, and it can happen to you or to me. A thought can become an act; an act can develop into a habit; a habit can shape a character; and our character determines our destiny.

Change may come about so gradually one may not realize what's happening. An alcoholic will hardly admit he's an alcoholic. He thinks he's in control when he isn't. A Christian who's overcome by moral error will think he's all right. He doesn't know the Lord has departed from him. Hebrews 3:12-13 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."

People can move from the spiritual to the fleshly, from loving to selfishness, from being careful to being careless, from being committed to being indifferent, from being holy to being ungodly, from being involved to getting distracted, from being wise to being foolish, from having faith to having doubts, and then losing all faith, and from being responsible to being irresponsible.

What are you becoming? Because of Delilah, Samson became spiritually empty, unfit to judge Israel, and he disgraced himself.

Hebrews 2:1-3 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

If Samson's story ended here, it would really be tragic; but something happened to Samson to bring him back to God. Stories don't have to end without hope! Judges 16:22 says, "But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved." Samson came back to God and learned to depend on Him! Hebrews 11:32 lists Samson as a hero of faith. What Samson became in the end is the reason why!

Judges 16:23-30 says "Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, 'Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.' And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, 'Our god has given our

enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.' And when their hearts were merry, they said, 'Call Samson, that he may entertain us.' So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, 'Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.' Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. Then Samson called to the LORD and said, 'O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.' And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines.' Then he bowed with all of his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life."

Samson prayed for strength, while listening to the blasphemies of the Philistines praising Dagon and mocking the Lord God. God answered his prayer. Samson lost his sight, his freedom, his relationship with God, and his dignity. But it was at the bottom where he learned to depend on and trust in God. Sometimes it takes hard things to move us back to God! To grow closer to God takes conscious, meaningful effort on our part! It takes courage and discipline.

The most successful people frequently don't know they're successful; they simply keep on doing what they have always been doing and make a powerful impact on the lives around them. Some people who find success easily don't realize how vulnerable they are to the influences of the world. To be a great servant of Christ takes time and effort! What are you doing with your life? What are you becoming? Let's pray together. O Father, help us to become worthy children who love You, who care about You, and who listen to You. And may Your will be done in our lives as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

The question my friend asked me is the simplest of questions, found in the soul of every person from a little child to the wisest elder. "What will come of what I am doing today or tomorrow? What will come of my whole life?" Well the Bible answers this question. Romans 2:6-11 says, God "will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."

So, I ask you, "What are you becoming?" What will God say to you when this life is over? If you keep going the spiritual direction that you're going right now, where will you be in five, ten, or twenty years? Will you be closer to God or farther away? Will you be obedient to His will, or will you ignore Him, or will you rebel against Him? What are you becoming? Your direction will not change until you decide to change. If you let others influence you in the wrong direction, you may end up sliding down a path that you'll regret. How sad it would be to wake up lost and not know the Lord had left you! Do you need to get right with God?

If you wish to become a Christian, believe with all your heart in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, turn from your sins in repentance and turn to the Lord, confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Do it today!

## "Jesus Understands"

Have you ever felt misunderstood, believed that no one knows what you're going through? Today, we're going to think about the One who understands. God has spoken to us in the Bible, and we want to hear what He says.

A farmer had just relaxed on the front porch when a newsboy delivered the evening paper. The boy saw the sign, "Puppies for Sale." He got off his bicycle and said to the farmer, "How much for a puppy, mister?" "Twenty-five dollars, son." Well, the boy's face dropped. "Sir, could I at least see them?" The farmer whistled, and in a moment the mother dog came bounding around the corner of the house followed by four cute puppies, wagging their tails and yipping with joy. A little later another puppy came straggling around the house, dragging a hind leg. "What's the matter with that puppy, mister?" the boy asked. "Son, that puppy is crippled. We took her to the vet and the doctor took an X-ray. She doesn't have a hip joint and that leg will never be right."

The boy dropped his bike, reached for his collection bag, and took out a fifty-cent piece. "Mister," the boy said, "Please, I want to buy that puppy. I'll pay you fifty cents every week until the 25 dollars is paid. Honest I will, mister." The farmer replied, "But Son, you don't seem to understand. That puppy will never, never be able to run or jump. That puppy is going to be a cripple forever. Why in the world would you want puppy like that?" The boy paused, and then he pulled up his pant leg, exposing that all too familiar iron brace and leather knee strap, holding a poor, twisted leg caused by polio. The boy said, "Mister, this puppy's going to need someone who understands and loves him." My friend, we all need somebody, too.

Our reading today comes from The Letter To The Hebrews 4:14-16. "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Let's pray together. O Father, when we're tempted and we have problems, we pray that we'll come to You for the help, the mercy, and the grace that You can give to us in a time of need. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Have there been times when you wished someone, just anyone, would understand and love you with all your faults and troubles? There is someone who does! He understands you and loves you. You may be hurting inside or outside; He understands. You may be tempted, but He understands. Your life may be hard, you may feel like quitting. He understands. You may have been offended and have reason to be angry. He understands. He knows all about you. He knows what you've been through. He knows how you think. He knows what you've done. He understands and loves you in spite of it all.

The Bible describes Jesus as one who understands all our struggles. As we've read, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16). Jesus experienced in his short life all the struggles and temptations that we face. He knows what it is to be human; and He also knows what it is to be Divine. He knows what it is to suffer and to be tempted. He knows how hard it is to do what is right when things are difficult. He knew the pain of the world turning against Him.

The Bible says that Jesus “knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25). As a human, Jesus understood hunger and thirst. Matthew 4:2 says, “And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” While hanging on the cross, Jesus, “knowing all that was now finished, He said to fulfill the Scriptures, ‘I thirst.’” We also know Jesus got tired at times. In John 4:5-6, the Bible says, “So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as He was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.” Yes, Jesus understood what it’s like to have the basic needs of life.

Jesus never had a wife or any children. No doubt He understood what it was like to be lonely. His father probably died before his ministry began, leaving Him with a mother and several siblings to support. Isaiah 53:3 says, “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

He had a hard life as an itinerant preacher. He was loved by some and hated by others. He never owned a home, walked everywhere He went, and knew what it was like to be rejected. Can you imagine from the time of your birth people saying that you were illegitimate? Can you imagine the soldiers of King Herod the Great hunting you to take your life? The Bible says, “Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were under two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men” (Matthew 2:16).

Can you imagine your family thinking that you were crazy? The Bible says, “And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind’ (Mark 3:21. The people who were supposed to know Him, and know Him best, didn’t understand how He could work miracles and teach such great things?

Can you imagine your own family and friends that you grew up with refusing to believe you? John 1:11 says, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” The people of his home town, Nazareth, rejected him and even tried to kill him. Mark 6:2-6 records this: “And on the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.’ And He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief.”

Can you imagine your disciple and friend betraying you for money? The Bible says, “Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him” (Matthew 26:14-16). Thirty pieces of silver? Exodus 21:32 says that this is the price of a slave. What treachery! Beyond that, can you imagine being betrayed with a kiss? That happened to Jesus.

Can you imagine being asked by your Father to be crucified? The Father sent his Son into this world to sacrifice Himself as an act of love and to deliver us from our sins. It was most difficult for Jesus to face the cross. He understood how utterly painful and humiliating crucifixion was in the first century. In Matthew 26:38 Jesus said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to the point of death.” Have you ever been so sorrowful that you wished you could just die that very moment?

The Bible describes His prayer in the garden in Luke 22:42 this way: “And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.”

Can you imagine your close friend and disciple lying three times about knowing you? The Bible describes the boast of Peter, “‘Although they all fall away because of you, I’ll never fall away.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’ And all the disciples said the same” (Matthew 26:33-35). But when the pressure came upon him, he buckled under the pressure as Jesus said he would. Peter denied Him not once, not twice, but three times; and the last time in the very presence of Jesus.”

Can you imagine having been bound and brought into court where people falsely accused you with lies? Can you imagine people purposefully twisting your words to condemn you? Can you imagine dying on the cross, bruised and bleeding, while the people around you were mocking you? Matthew 27:41-43 says: “So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He’s the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we’ll believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” Can you imagine remaining silent during all their ugly mockery? Can you imagine being in excruciating pain at the hands of very wicked men and never striking back?

Jesus understands the good and the bad, the easy and the hard, and the fair and the unfair. He knows everything about His people and His churches. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 Jesus spoke to each of the seven churches of Asia. To each of the seven he said, “I know your works.” He knew the positive and the negative. He praised them for the good and rebuked them for the bad. He praised them for their toil, their perseverance, their sound doctrine, their faithfulness in tribulation, their willingness to suffer poverty and even blasphemy for the name of Christ, and for how they lived, and how they showed love, their faith; He loved that about them, and their service to the Lord. But He rebuked them when they left their first love, when they compromised, when they supposedly were alive but had died, when they were distastefully lukewarm. Jesus knows about your spiritual life too, whether you’re growing or dying or lukewarm. He knew churches sometimes failed to be what they should be; and He rebuked and warned them because He loved them.

He knows when you’re tempted. I love God’s faithful promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13. The Bible says: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation also will provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” God understands your limits and He will not let temptation and trials so overwhelm you that you can’t endure them. When you can’t stand the temptation, the Lord will make a way of escape so that you don’t fall into sin. He’ll bless you and be there for you. He promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). The God who understands is also the God who stands by us to help us through all the struggles that we face.

Jesus knows when life has filled you with fear or heartache. He knows life can be overwhelming, but not one cause of your anxiety escapes His attention. First Peter 5:6-11 says, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the

God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Jesus knows your victories and your defeats. He knows your heart. If you love Him, He knows it. If you have ignored or forgotten him, He knows it too. If you've let sin come into your life, He knows it; and if you're overcome by that sin, He knows it and He grieves. In spite of all He loves us anyway and wants us to repent and to come to Him. He loves us even in our sins and weaknesses. To the lukewarm church at Laodicea, that He was ready to spit out of His mouth, the Lord Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and I knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens that door, I will come in to him and I'll eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Though Laodicea was lukewarm and so offensive that Jesus would spit them out of His mouth, still Jesus took the initiative to restore a relationship with them. He knocked at the door and He told them they needed to repent. The Lord wants a relationship with you. He wants to be your friend. He took the first step in building that relationship by offering Himself on the cross to atone for your sins, our sins. Won't you respond to His love and His grace? Won't you let Him into your life? Put your trust in Him and obey Him today! Let's pray together. O Father, we're so grateful that You do know all about us and love us, and were willing to give Your Son, Jesus, for our sins. Father, help us to come to You and to do Your will always on this earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

No matter who you are or what you've done in the past, the Lord's heart is big enough and open enough to forgive you and welcome you into his family if you're willing to come to him humbly and penitently. Saul of Tarsus was the chief of sinners, but God forgave him. The apostle Paul said, “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:12-16). If God could forgive Saul of Tarsus, he can forgive you, too!

Won't you humbly come to Jesus? Come in love and faith by repenting of your sins, confessing Him to be the Lord and Christ, and by being baptized in water? The Lord is longing for you to come to Him in love and obedience. “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). When you're baptized, He'll add you to His church. You'll be His child.

Sometimes Christians drift away from the Lord. If you've forgotten Jesus, you've built a spiritual barrier between the Lord and yourself. Come back to the Lord today by repenting. Get back to church. Just as the Lord forgave Peter, He'll forgive you.

We do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. It might be that you've have a spiritual problem or something that you just need to talk to somebody about. We'll be glad to help you find somebody in your area that you can talk to.

## "Judging"

The Lord Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged." What does that mean and is all judging wrong? Today we're going to explore what the Bible says about judging. Stay with us. We can't do anything nobler than searching for God's truth.

Raymond Kelcy, one of my Bible professors, used to quip that the two best known verses of the Bible were 1 Timothy 5:23 and Matthew 7:1. He said the worst reprobate in society, a person who never went to church, would know these verses: "Drink a little wine for your stomach's sake" and "Judge ye not, that ye be not judged." Of course, people who use these verses to justify their questionable lifestyles frequently haven't taken time to find out what else the Bible says. Our world especially likes to quote "Judge ye not" and then make an absolute rule against all judging. So opposed are they to judging they themselves will condemn anyone who judges. They think it's okay to condemn people who judge, not realizing that they've just become judges themselves.

Sin, however, is a problem; it's evil and destructive. Failure to speak against sin allows sin to grow and destroy lives, families, churches, and even whole societies. People who practice evil never want anyone to condemn them; they want complete tolerance. Some use this rule against judging to protect themselves from being detected. John 3:19-20 says, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." How do we deal with this dilemma? Do we remain silent about evil or do we speak out against it? What did Jesus mean when He told us not to judge?

Today, we're reading from the Words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:1-5. "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." Let's pray to God. Father, we're so grateful that by Your love and by Your kindness and wisdom You have given us Your will in the Word of God. Father, we pray that You'll bless us and help us to do Your will on earth, even as it's done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

When we study a passage, let's consider the cultural problems that the Lord Jesus faced. When Jesus spoke these words, judging others had become common, even over man-made traditions. People were condemning others not only because they failed to keep the Law but also because they failed to keep the oral traditions of the Pharisees. They were assuming the place of God by making their own laws and then condemning others for not keeping them.

The Pharisees and the scribes were famous for hanging a mountain by a thread—that is, building a large set of rules out of a simple passage. Many of these laws had nothing to do with the context of the passage. For instance, Exodus 23:19 says, "You are not to boil a kid in the milk of its mother." The Jews developed an entire system of what was and was not "kosher" from this passage and determined never to mix any meat with dairy products. The original law came because idolatrous Canaanites were boiling goat kids in their mothers' milk. The Israelites of Moses' day knew what it meant, but later generations out of misguided zeal took it to an extreme. They went beyond the original intent of the law and "hung a mountain on a thread."

The Pharisees who held to these oral traditions began to judge people not on the basis of the original law but on their man-made applications of that law. They developed a system of self-righteousness and self-justification. In their zeal the Pharisees became judgmental of anyone who

didn't live up to their high standards. They bullied the common people with their self-righteous attitudes and condemned anyone who didn't keep their traditions. Jesus wasn't arguing against making any judgments at all but against making abusive judgments on the basis of human traditions. They wanted to remove the speck out of others' eyes and didn't realize the log that was in their own eye.

The Pharisees showed little compassion or mercy on anyone who wasn't one of them. When it came to loving your neighbor as yourself, the Pharisees thought only of other Pharisees, only they were their neighbors. James 2:12-13 says, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." Again, James 4:11-12 says, "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law but a judge. There's only one lawgiver and judge, He who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"

In judging others, we may not know all the facts. Just because we think some act is all right doesn't mean God approves of it, and just because we think some act is wrong doesn't mean that God disapproves of it. God sees and knows the heart, something we may not see. Paul said, "For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. And then each one will receive his commendation from God" (1 Corinthians 4:4-5). Many things are best left in God's hands. "The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:9).

The apostle Paul dealt with a similar type of abusive judging in Romans 14. Some weaker brothers, whose consciences were tender but untaught, were judging others who felt the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols. And those who were eating that meat felt contempt for those who wouldn't eat. Paul instructs both groups to stop judging the other. "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). Christians must be careful, in such matters of opinion, not to judge. He said in verse thirteen, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way."

Some think that making any moral judgment is arrogant and intolerant. Many people today want to eliminate moral judgments altogether and permit people to do whatever they please. Many are asking, "Who's to say what is right or wrong?" When they say this, they show that they're ignoring both God and the harm that evil does in this world. So, we ask, "Is it ever right to judge?"

The Lord Jesus said, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged" (Matthew 7:1). Some quote this passage thinking this is all that Jesus said on the matter. They don't want anyone to judge anyone for any reason. But there's more to learn. For instance, consider Matthew 7:6: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." Who are the dogs and the swine? We must use our discretion to determine who the dogs and the swine are. Jesus teaches us to watch out for temptation and to know evil when we see it. He also said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16). We have to judge who is a wolf. Life demands making some judgments; and frankly, we cannot escape them.

Even those who say, "don't judge" are not consistent. The decision to be non-judgmental, the condemnation of judging, is itself a moral judgment. One can hardly keep from judging if one becomes a victim. People tend to downplay the sins that they commit, but they have a very

different perspective when they have been sinned against. "My" harmless talk about you is no big deal, but "your" cruel gossip about me is unforgiveable. People think that way. Drugs are a victimless crime until one of "my" loved ones overdoses. I may support the sexual revolution until someone else sleeps with "my" wife. People's attitudes change greatly when they become the offended rather than making excuses as an offender. Reality wakes us up.

It's naïve to think right and wrong don't matter. Children can't always distinguish right from wrong. The Hebrew writer worried about Christians who weren't maturing in their faith as they should, people who didn't know God's Word. He said, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you've come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14). They were in danger because they didn't know good from evil.

Any parent struggling to rear his children knows the daily judgments he must make for the sake of the children. He knows too that his task is to train the children to make right decisions. Making judgments is a large part of growing up. Fools resist ever making moral judgments. The wise realize that moral judgments keep them safe from evil and harm. Proverbs 22:3 says, "The prudent sees the evil and he hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it." Right and wrong matter because they lead in different directions. Doing good will bless, while doing evil ruins lives. Everyone should know that.

If we listen to the world instead of listening to God, we'll find that our morals today seem to be turned upside down. We live in moral chaos and confusion. Isaiah 5:20-21 says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight!" Our culture has forgotten God and His morality, and they have rewritten the moral laws to suit themselves. It's made good into evil and evil into good. All this confusion has destroyed our society's moral strength and moral courage; and it will destroy the fabric of our society and lead future generations into misery and loneliness. God grieves over those who are unwilling to make judgments about good and bad because they promote a permissiveness that infects the young and the weak with diseased values and morals.

Jesus described how we are to judge, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Jesus knew appearances could deceive, and so he cautioned people to make righteous judgments based upon the Scriptures and based upon the facts. The Scriptures are the basis for what is right and wrong, and facts tell us whether or not God's laws are transgressed. Some people say Jesus never judged anyone; but Jesus passed judgment on Judas, calling him the son of perdition (John 17:12) and stating that it would have been better for him not to have been born (Mark 14:21). Jesus took a whip, poured out the coins, and overturned the tables, and drove the money changers out of the temple in John 2:14-16. In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced eight woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites. Jesus also condemned Jezebel of Thyatira and her followers in Revelation 2:20-23, and He rebuked the others in that church for tolerating her. Second Timothy 4:8 calls Jesus the "righteous judge."

Jesus didn't judge with a mean spirit, for in spite of it all he loved Judas and even washed his feet with the other apostles. Jesus judged him on the basis of the facts. Judas was a thief (John 12:6), and for thirty pieces of silver he gave a betrayal kiss to his Master. Unfortunately, some people, unlike Jesus, jump too quickly to mistaken judgments. They judge unfairly or unrighteously

before the Scriptures are examined or the facts are known. Nevertheless, when the Scriptures are clear and the facts are known we must make judgments.

Paul led the way in judging the man who was living with his father's wife. He even rebuked the church at Corinth for failing to deal with the wicked man. He said, "You have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst" (1 Corinthians 5:2). He made it clear, "I . . . have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present." When the church was assembled, Paul commanded them "to deliver such a one to Satan." He knew that if he allowed this man's sin to go on that a "little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (1 Corinthians 5:6). So his counsel was "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (verse 13). Judging is necessary when the sin threatens the purity of the church.

The judgments of God are not my judgments or yours; they're God's judgments. God is God, and we aren't. If we desire to serve Him, we ought to honor His commandments and judgments. Jesus said, "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). The Lord Jesus will judge us righteously and fairly, but we must also commit ourselves to Him strongly enough to accept that what He teaches is right. God is more holy, more wise, and more understanding than we are. His judgments are true and righteous altogether. Let's trust His teaching and follow Him. When we follow Jesus, we know we're going in the right direction. Let's pray together. O Father, help us to do Your will, and to teach others to do Your will, and to follow Your teachings. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

Many people, even some preachers, have chosen non-judgmentalism as their path and they've remained silent about sin and remained silent about our need for salvation. When Christians remain silent, they can be sure the devil will speak out. When Christians remain silent, evil does as it pleases. When we ignore evil and immorality, we provide little protection to the weak, the naïve, and the young. We need bold watchmen who will guard the walls from the encroaching enemy and who will sound the alarm. We can't afford silence about sin. Is it ever right to judge? Yes, it's right; and sometimes it's mandatory.

The world loves for Christianity to teach nothing and to forbid nothing. The world welcomes a gospel that's emptied of theological content and morality. But a gospel without teaching and morality isn't really good news. The gospel found in the New Testament emphasizes sin, judgment, repentance, and the cross. If God doesn't condemn sin, then we wouldn't need a Savior; but the ugliness and the horror of sin calls out for our Savior. We'll never see the beauty of grace until we see the ugliness of sin, and we'll never see the enormity of God's love until we see sin as our enemy.

Come to the Lord Jesus to find the truth, to find what is moral and holy, and to find the love that saves us from the perils of sin. Hell is real; and if we don't turn to God's grace for freedom from sin and from the perils of this life, then we'll bear the everlasting penalty for that sin in the life to come. Place your trust in the Lord. Out of love turn from everything evil. Yes, repentance demands that we leave the wrong and turn to what is right. Then be baptized into Christ upon the confession of your faith. Baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of our sins. It unites us with Christ and causes us to be born again free from our sin. Oh my friend, why not come to the Lord today and be baptized?

## "Be Thankful"

How long has it been since you counted your blessings? How long has it been since you gave God a second thought? Today we're going to explore the value of giving thanks to God. We turn to the Bible to learn about the power and the wisdom of God. We know "Every good thing and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17). God is the source of life, of love, and of every blessing we enjoy. For that reason, we should come to know and to love Him. The best way to do that is through a diligent study of the Word of God.

Each year America sets aside a day to thank God for our blessings and to consider our relationship with Him. God has truly given us reason to be thankful. Let's never let it be said that we were ungrateful or forgetful for what God has done. William Law in his book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, said, "Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It's not he who prays most or fasts most; it's not he who gives the most alms, or is more eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it's he who is always thankful to God who wills everything that God wills, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it." In the old Anglo-Saxon, thankfulness means "thankfulness." Thinking of all God's blessings and goodness makes us grateful.

Let's set aside this week for more than turkey and ball games. Let's genuinely thank God for all that He's done for us today and every day! Let's consider our relationship to the One who gave us life and every blessing.

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Colossians 3:12-17. "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 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. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." That's a wonderful reading encouraging us to be thankful. Let's pray together. O Father, we are so grateful to You for the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. For all the blessings that we have of life, of our food, of our own, of our clothes and all of the blessings that You give us. And Father, we pray that we may always do Your will on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!

David said in Psalm 100:4, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name." A thankful heart is a cheerful heart and one ready to give praise to God. It counts its blessings and knows how good God has been to every one of us. David again urges us, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle" (Psalm 103:1-5).

The Bible says, "Through Him (that is 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" (Hebrews 13:15).

Thanksgiving is not just a holiday for once a year; it should be a way of life. The Bible 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” (James 1:17). Your food, your water, your clothing, and your house—all of them come from His loving hand. He does indeed crown us with lovingkindness and compassion. Some people grumble and complain about every little thing, not realizing all that God has done for us, and He does it every day.

God gives us many spiritual blessings. He gives us peace; He gives us His, Word the Bible, to teach and admonish us, He gives us a song to build us up, and He gives us a purpose in life. The goodness of God makes us better people. His love makes us want to love all the more.

It's not always easy to be thankful. Life is not always fair; and things don't always go smoothly. But, God said, “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; and in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). The test of a Christian is not will he give thanks when things are easy, but will he give thanks and praise God when life is harsh? Christians rejoice always for Christ and His cross, even when the world hates them. They don't quit praying because life is rough. They pray even more. They give thanks “in” everything and in every circumstance. They know everything is not good or pleasant; but they also know Romans 8:28. The Bible says: “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.” Not everything is good, but God can cause it to work for good. So we give thanks in everything.

The Pilgrims who came to America thought it good to thank God for their food and their lives. The Congress, in the earliest days of the United States, also thought it good to thank God for all His provisions of freedom and prosperity. On November 1, 1777, the United States Congress issued this proclamation to the whole nation:

“It is therefore recommended to the legislative or executive powers of these United States, to set apart Thursday, the 18th day of December next, for solemn thanksgiving and praise; that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts, and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor; and that together with their sincere acknowledgments and offerings, they may join the penitent confession of their manifold sins, whereby they had forfeited every favor, and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of remembrance; that it may please him graciously to afford his blessings on these governments of these states respectively, and prosper the public council of the whole; to inspire our commanders both by land and sea, and all that are under them, with that wisdom and fortitude which may render them fit instruments, under the providence of Almighty God, to secure for these United States the greatest of all blessings, independence and peace.”

This early Congressional proclamation asked America to confess their manifold sins and ask God to forgive them so that the government and the military may be fit instruments under the providence of Almighty God. The early Americans knew God was the source of their liberties. They also knew that if they abandoned the will of God that's found in the Bible they would lose the favor of God and their liberties. They knew what God said, “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it” (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

Nations do not stand or fall on the basis of their wealth or their might. No! Many nations have been very wealthy and powerful, yet they fell. We must understand that a nation stands or falls on the basis of its willingness to live by the principles found in God's Holy Word. The God of Heaven, the God of the Bible, is the true King of our country and of every country. He is a greater power than all our weapons.

The people who began this country understood God's role in its establishment. Did you know the very first act on the very first day of the very first Continental Congress on September 7, 1774, that their first act was to read Psalm 35 and pray? Did you know the representatives of that congress when they prayed were kneeling, bowed with reverence, and praying in the name of Jesus Christ? Who was kneeling? Patriots like George Washington, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay. Did you know that they began every day with prayer at 9 o'clock?

The Continental Congress on May 16, 1776 appointed a day of fasting and prayer for the colonies. They said, "The Congress.... Desirous... to have people of all ranks and degrees duly impressed with a solemn sense of God's superintending providence, and of their duty, devoutly to rely... on his aid and direction... Do earnestly recommend Friday, the 17th day of May be observed by the colonies as a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer; that we may, with united hearts, confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions, and, by sincere repentance and amendment of life, appease God's righteous displeasure, and do this through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain this pardon and forgiveness."

Benjamin Franklin said in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, "God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it (that's a quotation of Psalm 127:1). (Franklin said) I firmly believe this. I also believe that, without His concurring aid, that we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

After the first battle of Bull Run, Abraham Lincoln declared September 26, 1861 as a National Day of Prayer and Fasting. He said, "It is fit and becoming in all people, at all times, to acknowledge and revere the Supreme Government of God; to bow in humble submission to His chastisement; to confess and deplore their sins and transgressions in the full conviction that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and to pray, with all fervency and contrition, for the pardon of their past offenses, and for a blessing upon their present and prospective action."

When Solomon became king over Israel, he asked God's blessing on the nation. God answered Solomon's prayer with the words found in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. God said "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." Solomon knew being right with God makes a difference. By inspiration he said, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). One must wonder how long God will tolerate the sins of this or any nation.

We cannot take God's grace and blessing for granted, that He will always favor us regardless of how we live. Israel made that mistake, and Babylon destroyed them. When we allow taking the lives of the unborn and selling their organs, when two of every five children are born out of wedlock, when we're mixed up about morals and marriage, and when some have ousted God from public life, do you think God will remain silent? Isn't it time that we all took stock of our spiritual lives? Isn't it time that we repented of our sins and made changes in our lives? How can

we thank God one day and act like He doesn't exist the next day? We should thank God and remember what He's done for us every day.

Let's say "thank you" to God for His mercy and blessing. Let's never become like the nine lepers that Jesus healed. In Luke 17, 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, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. And then Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?'"

Merely saying thank You to God is a good beginning, but God wants more than mere appreciation. He wants our hearts, our souls, and our lives. The people of Haggai's day had grown so busy with their lives that they forgot the task that God had given them to do in rebuilding the temple. God said, "Consider your ways! You've sown much but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied;...you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns ways to put into a purse with holes" (Haggai 1:5-6). Could it be that we today are facing so many struggles because we too have forgotten our God? Could it be that we need to consider our ways and be thankful for what God has done?

We cannot expect to live in sin or apathy and still please God. Galatians 6:7-8 teaches, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Isn't it time that we humbled ourselves and began seeking the Lord? Let's pray together. O Father, we pray that we may come to love You more, and seek Your face, and humble our hearts, and repent of our sins. And, Father, may Your will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There's always a point at which God's patience comes to an end, when God sees that people have embraced evil and do not wish to change. Second Peter 2:4-10 says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; and if he didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the Godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority." We can't continue in sin and expect God to continue to bless us. Do you have sins in your life? Do you need to repent?

To become a Christian, put your trust wholeheartedly in Jesus Christ and in His Words in the Bible, turn your heart from sin to the Lord, and cease from sin and live for Jesus, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Acts 2:38 still says, "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." That promise is for all people for all time. When we're baptized, the Lord washes away our sins (Acts 22:16) and He makes us His children (Galatians 3:26-27). Oh, won't you become a Christian today?

## “Come Back to Church”

The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood because He loves people. But many today think church is unimportant. Join us In Search of the Lord's Way to find out what God says about worshipping with the church.

The Pew Forum researchers say 55 million adults in America identify themselves as having no affiliation with religion. There are nearly 100 million Americans who are “unchurched,” that is, they haven't been to church in quite a while. Even though they're not going now, most of the unchurched used to go to church. Many folks feel that you can be a good Christian and not attend any congregation. The Bible, however, places a high priority on active membership in church.

In Psalm 122 David sang, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” David and others would sing this song as they were walking up to Jerusalem to the temple to observe the feast. It was a psalm of ascent. Many people would walk for days to worship God. They had no car or chariot, but they wanted to be in the temple in the presence of God.

When brothers and sisters in Christ meet together for worship, they are meeting with God and with Christ. The church belongs to them; it's their family. Of course, the Lord wants to meet with every member of his family regularly. He loves each of you. When you stop going to church, the Lord and His people miss you. We're here to encourage you to live the Lord's way.

Our scripture reading today comes from The Letter to the Hebrews 10:22-25. “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” That's a great encouragement from Scripture to attend worship regularly at church. Recent studies say that large numbers of young adults have stopped attending church. Some find church boring or irrelevant. Some say the church is full of hypocrites or is so judgmental. Some don't feel as connected as they would like, and others say that they're just too busy to go to church. Life can certainly become difficult, but attending and participating in church offers an amazing opportunity to find spiritual strength and help with the most difficult tasks of life. I want to respond to some of the objections that people give for not going to church.

First, *there are hypocrites at church*. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something he doesn't intend to be. Yes, there are some pretenders at church, but most people come to church because they genuinely love God and want to live good lives. Everyone is weak, and everyone sins, but that doesn't mean that they're pretenders or actors. It means that they're human. Jesus told the apostles at the Garden of Gethsemane, “the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41), and that's still true of people today.

Before we start pointing fingers at others, perhaps we should look at our own lives. Do you really want to let someone else's bad behavior separate you from God? It seems much wiser to let God deal with the hypocrites and to make sure that we remain right with God. The Lord Jesus had to deal with hypocritical Pharisees during His entire ministry, but He never let their hypocrisy keep Him from doing what was right! He kept right on teaching and preaching in the

synagogues and loving people. Don't let someone else's sin infect your heart and turn you away from God.

Second, some say *church is boring or it's irrelevant*. When people use the word "boring," they're really describing their perspective or attitude. Any activity can be boring or exciting depending on the attitude of the person speaking. People usually get out of a worship service what they put into it. Give me the Word of God to nourish my soul.

David describes the "law of the Lord" in Psalm 19:10 as, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." This inspired psalmist was speaking about the Law of the Old Testament, which can be found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He found them desirable, valuable, and sweeter than honey. He found them so because they were meaningful to him.

The Word of God is also meaningful, and it can be meaningful to you. It will teach you where you came from, why you're here, and where you're going after this life is over. The Bible has the words of eternal life (John 12:50) and it has the truth that sets people free (John 8:32). The gospel is a message of grace and hope, peace and love; it's good news. It will teach you how to live victoriously in this life and how to face God on the Day of Judgment with confidence. The Bible is God's message of love and a message of truth. It will teach you how to avoid the pitfalls of life and it will give you purpose and direction. As the Divine book, the Bible will open the Lord's will for your life. A sincere study of God's Word can never be boring to one who wants to know and to please God.

Third, *some people say that people at church are judgmental*. It may seem that way. Actually, people everywhere are "judgmental." Have you ever been to a ball game where an umpire made a controversial call? Everybody gets excited about the call. Was he "in" or was he "out"? One group thinks the referee is blind, while the other group defends him. Conservatives judge liberals, and liberals judge them right back. Everyone makes judgments. One of the greatest ironies of our time is the way people view judging. It goes like this: Well, I can judge you, but don't you judge me!

As for judging, the real basis for making judgments about right and wrong is God's Holy Word. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment" (John 7:24). If God calls something sin, it is sin whether we agree with God or not. God knows His will, and He only calls things sinful because they are evil or hurtful. God said, through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

The people at church love others enough to tell them the truth about sin. Sin will cause a person to lose his soul. Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of sin is death." If I care about your soul, I'll talk about sin and I'll also talk about salvation. I don't say this to be hateful, but because I know how dangerous sin is to your soul. If I didn't care about you I'd simply ignore the subject of sin and let you bear your consequences. I'd tell you sin is "no big deal"; or "there's nothing to worry about!" To remain silent about sin or to lie about sin is cruel and it's uncaring. Telling people the truth about sin is kind. Don't be so quick to judge your neighbor at church.

Fourth, people say, *Well, I'm so busy I don't have time for church*. When I hear this I find it's usually an excuse. Most people can determine their priorities and their schedules. If you're too busy to add God to your schedule, just remember one day time will be no more, and you won't have any more time. God will require your soul of you, and you'll wish you could go back in time and change things.

The Lord Jesus knew that people would be busy making a living and needing food and clothes and shelter. The Lord said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). Putting the Lord first means spending time with Him and His family, the church, in worship and in service.

The Bible says: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we're going to go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:13-17). The right thing to do is to attend worship; to not attend could be sin.

Fifth, some people say, *Well, I don't feel connected at church.* Some folks find it hard to make friends at church the way they would like. The best way to make friends is to be a friend. Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man *that has* friends must show himself friendly." That is, if you come to church late and you leave as soon as the final "amen" is said, you'll probably never make many friends at church. Instead of waiting until everyone comes to you, reach out to other people. Get involved at church; get involved in some good work. Learn people's names. Attend Bible classes. Volunteer.

People say they aren't as close to God as they used to be. We ask the question, "Who moved?" Did God leave you or did you leave God? People can easily drift away from God and the church. The Bible says, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*" (Hebrews 2:1). It's easy to allow the world and its ways to cause our love for God and His church to grow weak. I hope that you haven't done that.

Through the years, I've grown close to a number of people who came back to church after being absent for a time. They were always so glad that they came back. From the time they left they felt empty and distant from God. They were miserable and spiritually unfulfilled without Him and needed to find their way home.

When people return to church, *they find that they grow closer to God.* The Lord wishes all people "might grope for Him and find Him, though He's not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:27-28). God is the Father of your spirit (Hebrews 12:9). He created you and has heard your prayers all your life. God gave His only Son, His only begotten Son, Jesus, for your sins because He cares about you. He gave you the Bible so that you might know Him and love Him. Church will help you know Him even better.

When people return to church, they find that they improve their personal understanding of what the Bible teaches. The Word of God is an amazing book filled with hope and truth. A lifetime is not enough to know everything the Bible teaches, but many people waste their minds on everything but this great treasure of spiritual knowledge. The Bible says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). If you want to know God's Word better, then attend Bible classes and worship at church.

When people return to church, they find *help in the religious training of their children.* Raising children in our nearly pagan society is tough enough, and parents need all the help that they can get. The church provides an environment where people want to serve the Lord and to live righteous lives. Churches provide moral and spiritual examples and make a lasting impact

on young lives. Churches provide Bible classes, camps, retreats, and youth gatherings with opportunities to be around other Christian young people.

When people return to church, they *discover ways of handling daily challenges*. The Bible says, “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). At church, you can pray with brothers and sisters in Christ and learn from the Bible how the faithful people of the Bible dealt with their problems in life. I’ve found people at church are “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another” (Romans 15:14).

Christians everywhere face struggles, yes! They’ve found the comfort of God and are finding that they’re able to comfort others and help them through their struggles. The apostle Paul said, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and 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” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

I tell you, the church is a blessing to us all. The Bible says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Oh, the church can keep you spiritually strong, able to resist all the temptations and pitfalls of life. You need the church. If you’ve wandered away, come home.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Church is where people build each other up spiritually and grow close to God. We all need that strength and encouragement that comes from being around the people of God.

Occasionally I hear of someone who’s had a bad experience at church. Someone has offended them or overlooked them. They react to this disappointment by quitting the church. If someone wrongs you, rather than quitting the Lord or the church, why not try a different approach. The Lord said, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15). This is the Lord’s way.

When you quit church for these reasons, you’re actually letting someone come between you and God. Or when you push Christ out of your life, you also are putting your soul in jeopardy. Listen again to Hebrews 10:25 and include verse 26, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” Don’t push the Savior out of your life. Who else will shed his blood to save you?

God wants to bless you. If you’re not yet a Christian, you can come to the Lord in faith and love by repenting of your sins, confessing the name of the Lord, and by being baptized. In baptism the Lord washes away your sins and He adds you to the church, His church. It could be that as a Christian you’ve become one of the unchurched. Come back to the Lord and don’t let anything keep you from the church. Don’t let anything make your heart grow hard. Come back and find the love of God.