

# *Program Transcripts*

For November 2016



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**November 2016**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **NOVEMBER 6 – CITIZENSHIP AS CHRISTIANS**

When it's time to elect government officials, should Christians get involved? Does the Bible have anything to say to the Christian citizen? What is the responsibility of the Christian as a citizen of his country.

## **NOVEMBER 13 – STRONG FAITH**

Without faith it is impossible to please God. What kind of faith does God desire from His people? What does a strong faith look like when challenged? How can we grow in our faith so that we can be better servants?

## **NOVEMBER 20 – TIME TO PRAY**

From time to time all of us need to re-enroll in the school of prayer. Prayer is how we speak to God, how we reveal our hearts to the Father, and how we express our thanks and praise to God.

## **NOVEMBER 27 – CONVERSION**

Sadly, many Christians are simply Christians in name only. Being baptized into Christ is necessary to please God, but God expects His people to be converted in heart and spirit as well. Are you truly converted to Christ?

## Citizenship as Christians

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Strong Faith

Without faith, it's impossible to please God. What kind of faith does God desire from His people? What does a strong faith look like when it's challenged? The Word of God gives us the answer. Paul said in Romans 10:17, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of God (or through the word of Christ)." The more we read and study God's Word, the stronger our faith will become. The more we study God's Word, the better we'll know God and His will for our lives. Nothing can replace a serious study of Scripture to help you grow in faith. Paul commended the elders of the church at Ephesus "to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). We need God's Word to build us up spiritually and to help us go to heaven.

To say, "I believe," means placing your complete trust in the Lord Jesus. It means trusting in God when you may not fully understand what lies ahead. Faith stands firm in your trust of God's promises even when life is filled with unsettling circumstances. Faith means taking God at His Word, regardless of what others say. Faith means being willing to act in obedience out of trust in the character and the authority of God Himself. We trust His Word, because we trust Him.

What we know about God, how He's dealt with people in the past, should speak to what we see for the future. It should tell us what God will do. The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it's of God or (what Jesus says) whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17). Are you willing to do His will? Do you trust God?

Our reading today comes from the book of Hebrews 11:1-6. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Let's pray together. O Father, we're thankful that these men of old gained approval by their faith, that they were willing to stay with what You have taught them, and that they were willing to obey You. And, Father we pray that You will help us to be obedient and to believe you as well. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it's impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He's a rewarder of those who seek Him." Faith is essential to our salvation and to living the Christian life. Faith makes a remarkable difference in how we think, how we act, and how we treat others.

There's a big difference between those who believe in Christ and those who don't know Him or believe in Him. When people really believe and put their faith into practice, they make the world brighter, more loving, more positive, more joyful, more hopeful, and closer to God. When people don't know God or have no faith in Him, they lack the wisdom that comes from God; they lack the love of God, and the hope of God. Without faith, they often turn to fairy tales and myths. They build for themselves idols that cannot talk, cannot hear their prayers, and cannot help them in a time of trouble. They live futile lives.

The Scriptures teach us of people who put their faith into practice and found the blessing of God. Hebrews 11:2 says, "For by it (that is, by faith) the men of God gained approval." God blesses true believers. Hebrews 11 gives many examples of faith in action.

Hebrews 11:7 says, "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." Noah took what God told him to heart. He built an ark to the saving of his family. Genesis 6:22 says, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did." Real faith is not dead; it is active and living. It reveals itself by doing what God commands.

Hebrews 11: 8 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." God made a covenant with Abraham and made him a promise that he would make of him a great nation. God called Abraham at the age of seventy-five, when he lived in Haran and told him to go to the land of Canaan. Abraham obeyed, even though he didn't know how God would accomplish all these things or when. Faith obeys even when it doesn't understand all the reasons why, or the ways how, or even when.

Faith calls us to trust God and to be obedient to His Word. Do you believe the Bible is God's Word? Do you believe that God created the world in six days and created you? Do you believe in heaven and in hell? Believing God means believing what we've been told. If we don't believe what God says in His inspired Word, we really don't believe God.

Do you believe the Bible is true? Do you believe God has all authority? Do you follow the Lord in all that He instructs? He tells us what to believe and what to do. Are you willing to obey God's Word, even when it disagrees with your friends, and family, and neighbors? Are you willing to adjust your thinking on every subject to what the Bible says? Are you willing to do what the Bible says, even if you don't want to? Do you believe God's promises will prove true?

To claim "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Lord" means that I've given myself to Him and will believe what He teaches. Faith is not selective in what it believes. It doesn't say that it believes some things that Jesus teaches while ignoring other things. If one believes Jesus is truly God's Son, risen from the dead, and knows all things, one believes Him completely. He will stand with Jesus even when the whole world disagrees.

Great faith is the answer to fear. To believe in God's promises helps us to cope in the best way with the challenges of life. When we believe, we know God will take care of us. Even if we should suffer for our faith, we lose the love of God when we don't believe. When the disciples thought the storm on the Sea of Galilee would overtake them, Jesus said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). We all face frightening storms, but when the Lord is with us, we must not abandon all hope.

The apostle Peter, inspired of God, prepared the church for the Roman persecution. He said, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it's better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong" (1 Peter 3:13-17).

Strong faith in Christ will determine how we will live. There's a significant difference



between those who truly believe and those who doubt. Our faith in God's teaching will determine our morals and our values. Since God's Word is final and authoritative, we reject the notion that morals are relative and dependent on circumstances. God's morality matters. Since we believe the Lord will judge us on the last day by His Word and by our deeds, there are firm reasons to be moral beings, to love and respect others, and to live with integrity and honesty.

Only faith in a God to whom we must answer provides the constant motivation for right living. Paul could warn the Athenian philosophers, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He's fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). If I believe, I cannot keep on doing the things that are wrong. If I believe, I can't keep on lying; I can't keep on stealing, using foul language, gossiping, getting drunk, coveting other men's possessions; I can't keep on committing acts of fornication, or taking vengeance, and many other sins. I must regard myself as dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Faith doesn't pick out some sins as wrong and some as insignificant. To believe God means to believe all sin is hurtful, destructive, and wrong. Are you willing to sacrifice friendship with the world to be a Christian?

It should never surprise us that the world is worldly, filled with selfish ambition, lusts, and the desire to overthrow the rules God placed upon us. Many have cast off the teaching of God in Scripture for their own opinions, morals, and desires. This rejection of faith in God shows why our society is in a moral mess and full of chaos. The apostle Paul described the pagan world of the first century, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19). When people fail to give themselves to God, they start giving themselves to sin.

One talk show recently suggested that we live in a post-fact world. That is, people don't want the facts if they disagree with their preconceived ideas or agendas. Some in our culture are driven more by their passions than by their logic. They follow their passions and follow their friends rather than seek the truth. They do what they want to do rather than what they ought to do. When our desires rule over our duties, when our lusts overrule our morals, when our emotions overrule the facts, we are indeed living a fantasy headed for ruin. Like the prodigal, we'll one day find total permissiveness leads us to a pig pen.

How badly we need faith, a confident trust in what God says to be true! When we leave the Truth, the way things really are as God revealed them, we're left with chaos and confusion. Without God's revealed will, we don't know where we came from, why we're here, or what will happen to us once this life is over. Without God's instructions, we're on a road to destruction. We need God's teaching, God's salvation, God's providence, and God's instructions. The Lord Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Without God's teaching there is no real nourishment for the soul.

Many people have bought into the idea that they should never express their faith to others, but should keep it private. They believe we should eliminate anything "Christian" from the public square. They would separate Christianity from every aspect of life. When you reject faith in Christ, you're promoting faith in something futile, something that cannot save you or give you eternal life. You're advocating a faith based on things less than God, less than moral,

and less than true. When faith in Christ is lost, people place their faith in a fantasy!

Belief in the God of the Bible is not like believing in an idol or in some humanly manufactured religion. Belief in God is not some blind leap of faith. Belief in God is built upon solid evidence found in our created world, found in Scripture, found in history, found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and found in our very nature as moral beings. The DNA in every cell of your body and mine could only come from a great intelligence. The universe with stars, and planets, and moons could only come from a great power. The moral conscientiousness that's inside your heart could only come from a moral governor. The moral and spiritual wisdom found in Scripture could only come from a Divine source. Yes, there is a God in heaven, who made you, who loves you, who sent His Son to die for you, and who will one day judge you by His Word.

Since God is real, don't hesitate to come to Him, to know Him, to love Him, and to obey Him. Don't hesitate to give yourself fully to Him. Coming to Christ means denying ourselves and taking up our crosses to follow Him. True faith involves a full commitment. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Have you made a full commitment to Christ or are you wavering in your faith? Jesus Christ fully committed Himself to you upon the cross for your sins in the hope that you would respond to His love by fully trusting and obeying Him. Love Him, trust Him, serve Him! If you believe, don't hesitate any longer.

People frequently tell themselves things that simply aren't true rather than having to deal with what God teaches. They put off making any decision or commitment. They think somehow everything will be okay in the end regardless of what they believe or do. Oh, it would be sad to face the Lord in judgment spiritually unprepared. I don't know of any promise of God to bless the unbeliever or the disobedient.

We don't like to think that anyone would be lost; but we mustn't presume upon the grace of God. We have no promise of salvation apart from grace, or apart from faith, or apart from repentance, or apart from obedience. We want the truth. We don't want any surprises on the day of judgment. We don't want to be deceived, thinking that we're saved, and then finding out we're rejected.

God will save those who place their trust in Him, those who repent of their sins, and those who are willing to obey His word. James 1:22-25 says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he's looked at himself and gone away, he's immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does."

If you truly believe in Jesus Christ, if you repent of your sins, if you turn your heart to the teaching of Christ, if you confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and you're baptized into Christ and you do that for the forgiveness of your sins, God can save you and He will. Baptism is not for little children but for those who are old enough to really believe and to repent. When you're baptized, God will wash away all of your sins, He'll make you His child; and you'll have His blessing only if you remain faithful. Oh, will you be baptized, and will you remain faithful?

## Time to Pray

This week and every week, let's take time to pray and to give thanks. Today we're going to look at the value of expressing our hearts to God. We search the Scriptures for God's will. We want to please God in every way, and so we take the time to listen to what God has to say. Our Father in heaven speaks today through His written Word. He gives us a message that is true for all time and all people. We study God's Word, because it has God's wisdom. We need that wisdom!

Daniel chose to spend the night in the lions' den rather than go one day without prayer. He believed praying to God was more important than his own life. Prayer is how we personally tell God all the things that are in our hearts. It's one means of adoring Him, thanking Him, and praising Him. Prayer time allows us to confess our sins and to ask God's forgiveness. Prayer gives us an opportunity to ask God to meet our needs or the needs of people that we love. God invites us to pray to Him as our Father. He loves us that much.

First Thessalonians 5:17 urges us to "Pray without ceasing." We should never give up on praying or lose heart. Acts 2:42 reminds us that the early church was "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." Why does God want us to concentrate on praying day after day? Because God knows how much good a strong prayer life will be to your soul. If you wish to renew your zeal for God or merely draw closer to God, then take time each day to get alone with God and pray fervently from your heart.

Our reading today comes from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:7-11. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Even though He was the Son of God, Jesus saw value in prayer. Mark 1:35 says, "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there." Jesus needed time alone with the Father and He needed time to prepare His heart for the day's tasks. Luke 5:16 says, "He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." Before Jesus appointed the twelve disciples to be apostles, He felt the need to pray. Luke 6:12 says, "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." Have you ever spent even a single hour in prayer?

I can't imagine all that Jesus felt on the night that He was betrayed. Jesus knew what struggles lay ahead of Him during the trials and on the cross. He knew that He would die a most painful death and He would bear the sins of the whole world. He prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane for three hours. Luke 22:42 says He prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done." Jesus prayed for the Father's will to be done. Again, He said to His Father, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Jesus was willing to pay the ultimate price with His own blood.

The Lord Jesus began and ended His crucifixion and His death with prayer. While they were nailing Him to the cross, Jesus was praying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Even while these hardened soldiers were putting nails through His hands and feet, He was thinking of their forgiveness. Such was His devotion to granting forgiveness to the lost. He wanted everyone to be saved. His last words after suffering for six hours, and as He was breathing his last, were, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). His heart and mind throughout this horrifying time was upon His relationship to the Father and doing the Father’s will. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more so do we?

God not only wanted us to pray, and He also wanted to hear our hearts, He also knew the value of prayer to our daily lives. Praying can bless your life in a multitude of ways. I just want to mention a few:

First, prayer can help you in times of temptation. The Lord Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the Garden of Gethsemane. He wanted them to pray and to watch with Him. While He was pouring out His heart in prayer, they were falling asleep. The Lord Jesus told them, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing He said, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Prayer can help us to remain close to God in trying times. When Satan tempts us, prayer can strengthen our hearts and help us overcome the temptation. We don’t have to fight temptation alone. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “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.” God will help us.

We also need to understand that the devil means business when he tempts us. He wants us to sin and break our relationship with the Lord. James 4:7-8 says, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” God will protect and help us when we pray. Someone has said, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.”

Second, prayer can help you in times of worry and struggle. First Peter 5:7 reminds us to cast “all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.” We all face worries and fears, but we can cast those anxieties on the Lord. The Lord cares about you and your daily life. No problem is too big or too small for the Lord. I love the promise in Philippians 4:6-7: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

God wants you to be at peace, to find security in Him. Instead of worrying about every problem that comes along, tell God about it! By prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. While you’re asking, thank Him for listening, for caring, and for helping you. What will happen, if you pray? God will give you a true peace of heart and mind that surpasses all understanding. He will place a guard all around your heart and mind; He won’t let your worries overcome you. He won’t abandon you. He won’t forget you. In every difficult situation, prayer to God with faith will help you ride out the storm.

Third, prayer can help you grow closer to God. When we pray regularly and truly desire that the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven, we build our devotion to Him. When we see our prayers answered, it makes us love Him all the more. Prayer helps us see things

differently and to want what God wants. The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6). How I wish every person in America, every person in the world hungered and thirsted for righteousness. This would change our country; it would change our world, and make it a better, more loving, more joyful, more hopeful, more honest, and more honorable society. Wouldn't you like to live in a world that had no crime, no drunkenness, no immorality, no hatred, and no prejudice? Wouldn't you like to live in a country where people helped each other, respected each other, and told the truth?

Prayer is the greatest precautionary measure that you can take against falling away from the living God. The first step in falling away from God is when people stop praying and become indifferent, and in time they forsake God altogether. Praying and being close to God will keep you from growing complacent and apathetic. Praying reminds you of the most important matters of life. When you pray, you think of your soul and you think of the souls of those around you. In prayer, you thank God for His blessings, and this makes you appreciate and love Him all the more. Praying every day will change your life; taking time to talk with God will renew your spirit and keep your values and priorities straight. It will give you a safe place to go from the world and all its temptations. Jesus needed time with His Father, and so do we.

Fourth, prayer can help you in your work for God. Prayer gives us the strength to carry on in our labor for the Lord. In Ephesians 6:19, Paul asked the church at Ephesus to “pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.” When we knock, God opens the door. When we are weak, God gives us the strength to bear our burdens. Sidlow Baxter said, “Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons – but they are helpless against our prayers.”

I think of Nehemiah, and how he heard, “The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” Nehemiah 1:4 says, “When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” We too, hear bad news now and then. What do you do? Nehemiah wept and mourned for days; he fasted and prayed. If you are hurting and in fear, pray for God to help you make a difference. God heard Nehemiah's prayer and helped him rebuild Jerusalem.

We all find ourselves inadequate at times, unskilled, lacking wisdom, or unprepared for the challenge. At those times, we pray for God's help! Paul said, “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5). This is certainly true! God can work in and through us to do things that we couldn't do by ourselves. Never give up on the power of prayer! Never give up on God! If we're ever to recapture the zeal of the first century church, it will begin with prayer.

Paul praised God in Ephesians 3:20-21. He said, “Now to Him who is able to do far abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” Oh, we need to ask for God's help!

Fifth, praying can reassure you. Sometimes we just need to be close to the One we love. We need to tell Him we love Him, to thank Him, to praise Him, and to take our burdens to Him. Prayer is a great reminder that we have a “Father” in heaven. The Lord Jesus said, “your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). He knows all about

everything, and He wants to bless us. Jesus asked, “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, he won’t give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?” ‘If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!’” (Matthew 7:9-11). God is willing and He’s waiting for us to ask! Nothing is more reassuring than seeing prayer answered.

God will answer our prayers. The Lord Jesus said, “Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, that whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have (that is, have already) received them, and they will be granted you” (Mark 11:22-24). Faith and willingness to do God’s will are vital to our prayers.

James 1:5-8 says, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” When I need God’s wisdom to help me work through a problem, I pray and God answers. I know He has helped me in the past and will continue to help me. God isn’t offended by my asking. He’s generous and happy to help.

So, prayer is how we connect with our Father in heaven. We can connect anytime, anyplace. We need God every day and every hour. How is your prayer life? Are you a man or woman of prayer?

Real prayer, heartfelt and fervent, blesses both God and man. Proverbs 15:8 says, “the prayer of the upright is His delight.” God wants to hear from you regularly. You don’t have to beg God to be heard. He wants to hear your heartfelt prayers. It’s a joy to count my blessings and recall all the good that my God has done. It’s a great blessing to share my heart, my burdens, my fears, and my concerns with my Father in heaven, knowing He cares to listen and that He can do something about them.

When people tell me about some trouble they face, maybe it’s trouble at home, or trouble financially, trouble with their health, or trouble on the job, I ask them, “Have you prayed about it?” Don’t give up on God too quickly. Don’t imagine that God is unaware of our troubles and cares. God may very well be working behind the scenes in ways that we cannot see and we don’t understand to answer those prayers. God doesn’t always give us what we ask for, but He always gives us what is best for our souls. Let’s trust in God when we pray.

Some folks think that salvation comes from simply saying a “sinner’s prayer.” The New Testament, however, never speaks of a “sinner’s prayer.” Does that surprise you? Saying a “sinner’s prayer” is a modern invention. To be saved, the Lord expects people to believe in Him, to love Him, to repent of their sins, to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and to be baptized in His name for the forgiveness of their sins. In Acts 22:16, Saul of Tarsus was baptized to wash away His sins, calling on His name. According to 1 Peter 3:21 baptism is how we appeal to God for a good conscience. We hope that you’ll follow the Lord’s teaching and be baptized today for the forgiveness of your sins. When you do, the Lord will add you to His church and make you His child.

## Conversion

About three fourths of the people in America claim to be Christians, but many who claim this don't live or talk like Christians. Today, we're going to talk about conversion. Nothing in life is more important than a sincere study of the Word of God. God has spoken to us so that we can know His will and make the changes to our attitudes and our behavior that pleases Him and blesses us. God gave His Word for our good. It teaches us, guides us, protects us, rebukes us, and encourages us. The Bible is our only hope for eternal life, and we must understand what it says.

Matthew 18:1-4 speaks of an encounter that Jesus had with his disciples. The Bible says: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" Conversion is not a childish act, because only the mature can choose to set aside their fleshly desires and become like children.

The Lord knows our hearts. He knows that we need to make conscious changes in our thinking in order to be the kind of people who can enter heaven. We must turn from what is evil to what is good. We must have the humility and the faith of a child, who looks to the Lord rather than depend on his own ability. Being converted turns our hearts from our fleshly desires to what God expects. Repentance is deeply involved in conversion. We must have a change of heart that leads to a change of life.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Luke 13:1-5. It contains the Words of Jesus. "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

Occasionally I encounter people who are Christians in name only. They claim to be Christian, but you couldn't tell it from the way they think, or talk, or act. They say they're Christians, but they don't behave the way a committed Christian behaves. They rarely pray, rarely go to church, rarely read their Bibles, and rarely talk about Christian beliefs. By listening to their language or watching their behavior, you might not be able to distinguish them from someone who never goes to church. Christians in name only are as likely to gamble, or drink alcohol, or watch sexually explicit movies, or use four-letter words as people who say they have no faith at all. In fact, many of these folks have stopped living for the Lord altogether.

If you ask them if they are Christians, they might be offended; but you couldn't tell it from the way they act or talk. For them Christianity is more inherited than chosen, more assumed than embraced. They were told when they were young that their family was Christian. They say they are, but one wonders if they were really converted to Jesus.

On other occasions, I've encountered folks who were once faithful church members but fell away from the truth of the gospel to follow popular religion, where worship is replaced by

entertainment or the inspired gospel is replaced by man-centered doctrines or human traditions. One wonders how someone who was once strong in the faith could leave the truth of the Scripture for a lie or forget Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. One wonders how they could follow things that are never mentioned in Scripture but were innovations of men and then imagine that they're acceptable to God. Didn't Jesus say, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:13-14). How can they say they are converted to the Lord Jesus?

Conversion is a life-changing event, a transition from darkness into light, from the fleshly to the holy, from the deceptions of men to the truth of God in Scripture. Like a child, we choose to trust what God says is true and right, trust how He wants us to live, and determine how we will do whatever He commands. This change of heart is enlightening; it opens our hearts to a new and better way than the sinful ways of the world. The Lord wanted Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in order "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18).

To be converted means that you will change what you believe, change how you will live, and leave sin to walk in righteousness. God doesn't save us merely to forgive our sins. He saves us to turn our hearts so that we can pursue a holy and righteous life! Titus 2:11-14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Conversion means that I must die to myself, die to my desires, and die to my sin. I can't continue to sin and still remain right with the Lord. Paul asked, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). We just can't do that! Becoming a Christian means that I die to sinful ways. I don't practice sin; I don't think sinful thoughts, or at least whenever I'm tempted I don't stay there; I don't give in to my sinful feelings; or say sinful words anymore. I'm no longer what I used to be. When we're baptized into Christ, "our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6). Our attitudes and our behavior must change.

Paul concludes, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:12-13). Some people are baptized but fail to repent, to stop their sins, and to serve the Lord in righteousness; they never get around to that. Again, he says, "So then, brethren, we're under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you're putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:12-13). Those who call themselves a Christian but live sinfully after the desires of the flesh will die spiritually and be lost.

So, let's follow the words of Colossians 3:5-11: "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts



to idolatry. For it's because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them (that is, those sinful ways) you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” Oh, that, my friend, is conversion! It's a change of heart and life, turning from the old way of sin to a new and righteous way that follows in the steps of Jesus.

Even a word spoken in private matters is important. We may think we've spoken or acted in secret, but secrets don't always stay secret. God always sees, hears, and knows. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.” The wicked person discounts God, ignores God, and assumes “God has forgotten; He's hidden His face; He'll never see it” (Psalm 10:2-11). But God does see and hear. Words also matter, because they reveal our inner person. The Lord Jesus said, “The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34). Christians should speak words that edify and bless. “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it'll give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

This world is darkened, callous, ignorant, sensual, impure, and greedy. Paul explained, “So I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:17-19). Oh, what a terrible situation. God certainly wants something better for us!

Paul continues in verses 20 to 24, “But you didn't learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and you put on the new self, which is in the likeness of God, and it's been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

What Jesus teaches is better than what the world offers. The Lord Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). Jesus expects his converts to hear His Word and believe God sent Him to be Savior, if they want eternal life.

Don't say, “I believe in Jesus,” if you're not willing to believe what He says. Jesus once asked, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). To call Jesus “Lord” and yet never be willing to do His will is hypocrisy. God distinguishes between a man who claims to believe and a man who actually lives out what he believes. First John 2:4-6 explains: “The one who says, ‘I've come to know Him,’ (that is, I'm a Christian) and doesn't keep His commandments, that person is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we're in him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He

walked.” We prove our faith and our love for Jesus by keeping His commandments and abiding in His Word. Claiming to love Jesus while ignoring his Word is merely a delusion. Oh, my friend be real; be genuine.

We must recognize and treat Jesus as our Lord as well as our Savior. Only then do we have the kind of faith to be saved. Be doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. James said that in humility we're to “receive the word that's implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). The faith that pleases the Lord is first humble, realizing that God is God, who knows all, sees all, and is wiser than we are. Let's love and trust Him enough to listen and to do all that He commands. Considering what Jesus did for us, that's the least that we can do.

Faith leads a person to obey the Lord in every respect. If I believe in the Lord, I will love and trust Him. That means I want to be saved and live with Him forever. If I believe in Jesus, I'll confess that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God and my Lord. If I call Him Lord, I'll change my heart and I'll change my life. I'll repent of every sin. I'll stop my rebellion and I'll honor Him by being obedient.

If I believe in Jesus, I'll be baptized in water for the forgiveness of my sins (Acts 2:38). I'll be born of water and the Spirit in baptism to enter into His kingdom (John 3:5). I will be baptized to have my sins washed away (Acts 22:16). I want to be buried with Him in baptism so that I can rise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-7). With humility I'll do what the Lord says without trying to argue that I can be saved a different way. I'll trust Him to the point that whatever He says, I'll do.

When we're converted to Christ, we'll think like Jesus thinks, love like Jesus loves, act like Jesus acts, and obey like Jesus obeyed. We'll stop pleasing the world and start pleasing God. Jesus said, “for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:29). When we're converted, we'll examine what people teach with what the Bible says. There are a multitude of religious voices in our world. Conversion to Christ means I'll stop listening to the human doctrines and start testing everything by the Word. First Thessalonians 5:21-22 says, “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; and abstain from every form of evil.” We must evaluate religious teaching and it's practices to see if those things come from God or from man.

The Bible says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Don't believe everything that you hear some preachers say. Be like the noble Bereans. “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

When we become servants of Christ, we cannot accept every idea that comes along. We must compare what we hear with a Scripture! If it doesn't agree with Scripture, don't follow it. True disciples abide in the words of Christ (John 8:31). We want everyone to be a true disciple. So believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and out of love repent of your sins, confess Jesus, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Conversion doesn't end with a change of heart; it also changes the relationship with God. When you're baptized you become a child of God! The Lord adds you to His church! God unites you with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection so that you can walk in newness of life. Oh, my friend won't you be converted today?