

Program Transcripts

For December 2016



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

December 2016

Topics subject to change without notice

DECEMBER 4 – LIFTED UP

Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). The Lord Jesus bore the cross to save us from sin and to show His love. He knew the love of the cross would call for us to love Him and come to Him.

DECEMBER 11 – PLEASING GOD

God wants to find His people pleasing and acceptable in His sight. Some today are selfishly ambitious, while others forget God and are people-pleasers. It is only by pleasing God, however, that we can bless ourselves and others.

DECEMBER 18 – WHERE IS GOD?

When trouble and worry come our way, we wonder if God has forgotten us. When it seems that evil has overcome good, we wonder if God will help us. Where is God when it seems our world has fallen in on us?

DECEMBER 25 – JESUS BLESSES US

The Scriptures reveal several reasons why Jesus came into this world, and each of those reasons describes a blessing for mankind. The Lord’s coming touches each of our lives and opens up a wonderful opportunity for us to know God.

Lifted Up

The Lord Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). We would all do well today to take a long look at the cross. We know that the Scripture is what leads us to God in heaven and His Son Jesus Christ. The Scripture teaches us what we know about the Lord Jesus. So, we study it again and again!

The story of the cross of Christ occupies a large portion of the New Testament. So important is the cross, the apostle Paul said, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). A sweet lady once said that she had difficulty thinking about the death of Jesus on the cross. She wondered why we talk about something so awful as crucifixion. Of course, the cross is an instrument of death; but it also has a message for each of us that is so vital that none of us can afford to miss it.

To contemplate the death of Christ will have a definite effect on the heart. No one can think long and hard about the suffering of Jesus and not be moved by it. There may be many things about the death of Christ we may not understand in this life; still the Bible does reveal some things to us of great value. The New Testament mentions the death of Christ 175 times. So, it's helpful to learn what we can about the death of Jesus and its connection with our salvation and our eternity. It's touching to know that Jesus was willing to give his head to a crown of thorns, his back to a cruel scourging, his hands and feet to nails, and his side to a spear. Asking why Jesus would do this is very, very important.

Our reading today is from The Gospel According to John 12:27-32. "'Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, 'This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.'" Jesus here was predicting His death upon the cross. Perhaps you've sung James Coats' hymn, "Where Could I Go?"; it says, "Living below in this old sinful world, Hardly a comfort can afford; Striving alone to face temptations sore, Where could I go but to the Lord? Where could I go, O where could I go, Seeking a refuge for my soul? Needing a friend to save me in the end, Where could I go but to the Lord?" At times going to the Lord is the only real option we have. Whether we know it or not, we all need God. We need His love, His peace, His joy, His hope, and His salvation. I don't know where you are in this life, but I know that you need the Lord in your life.

Jesus is real and genuine. He has proven Himself time and again to be everything that He claims. You can trust His teaching and His promises. You can depend upon Him to help you through the toughest of times. Some think of Jesus as merely one among many religious leaders, but Jesus is quite unique. Who else was born of a virgin? Who else fulfilled so many Old Testament prophecies? Who else arose from the dead? Who else could raise the dead, heal the sick, or walk upon water? Before someone says that these miracles are just myths, I ask, "Are you sure?" If these are just myths, how do you account for so many disciples holding to them with their last breath?

How do you account for the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled? He was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2. He was the seed of woman. He had his hands and his feet pierced as Psalm 22:16 says. He was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver as Zechariah 11:12 says. He was to die with the wicked, and be buried with the rich as Isaiah 53 prophesies. Oh, there are dozens of prophecies in the Old Testament about the life of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled every one of those prophecies. No other person in all of history has done that or could do that. To fulfill so many specific prophecies shows that He is from God. Centuries before he was born and centuries after, men still looked to Jesus as the central person of all history. For me, this is still 'AD 2016,' that is, "in the year of our Lord, 2016."

Unfortunately, many have ignored the Lord Jesus. I was shocked when I learned that the fastest growing religious group in America describe themselves as unaffiliated. Nearly one in four Americans says that they have no religion. Many of these came from Christian homes, and for whatever reason they abandoned their faith in Jesus. They are the "un-churched" and place no allegiance in anything spiritual. Perhaps you're a person choosing to be "without God and without hope in this present world." When you abandon God, realize this! You also abandon God's help and hope, His peace and joy, and His love and grace.

Where will you go, my friend, to find what only the Lord Jesus can give? No one else has what He has. No one can give you what He can give you. No one will ever love you the way the Lord loves you. You might have a thousand friends in your lifetime, but which of your friends has ever died for you? Which one ever felt the repeated blows of a cruel whip on his back? Which one ever took nails through his hands and feet? Which one ever hung suspended between heaven and earth until he could breathe no more for you? Which of your friends ever took your sins upon himself and died for them? You can search the world over and never find anyone who will love you like Jesus did!

The apostle Paul said, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8). The Lord Jesus died for us, not because we had befriended Him, but because He had come to love us. We were helpless, ungodly, and sinners; but Jesus died for us anyway. You can't measure that kind of love; it's much deeper than a casual friendship. It's the kind of love that we all long for, the kind of love that we cannot ignore or forget.

It's hard for me to understand what happens in the heart of a person who forgets what Jesus did for him. The Hebrew writer warns, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it's still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13). Yes, sin can deceive our hearts and harden them. People can become enslaved to some favorite sin to the point that they'll desert the church and the Lord. I knew a minister who had a beautiful wife, but began seeing another woman. It wasn't long until he had not only left his wife but left the church altogether. Oh, he knew that he had sinned, but this man shut all of his friends out and

wouldn't talk to anyone. There he was, risking his soul to remain in his sin.

You may not be caught up in sin like this former minister was, but your sin can separate you from God and His people just like it did him. If you say no to Jesus, who then will love you like He did? Who will you find to pay for your sins? No one will, and no one can. You must face the consequences of your sin on your own. Paul said, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time" (1 Timothy 2:3-6). Jesus is the only one who could ransom you from sin.

If you reject Jesus, there is no other Savior who can rescue you from the consequences of sin. Peter said there is none other name under heaven, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). There is only one Savior, and that's Jesus Christ. If you choose sin over Him, you need to know what Paul said, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The wages of sin have not changed in all these years—it's still death. I would hate to see you harden your heart against God. If you do, realize that God will say no to you for the life hereafter. Once this life is over, you can't turn back the clock. You can't wish your choices away. You will face the Lord!

Whether you face the Lord on that day, the Day of Judgment, with joy and peace or with dread and panic is up to you. You're actually choosing life or death by your choice of whether to serve the Lord or not. If you reject the Lord, you will not find any promise for the hereafter. You might find great success today; you might become rich and famous; you might have great power and influence, and have the pleasures of life at every turn; but if you don't have the Lord Jesus in your life, you're putting your soul at risk of being lost eternally. Paul said, "she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives" (1 Timothy 5:6). I suspect today there are many, many people physically alive but spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins.

What should you do if you find that you are living without the hope of the cross? Take a long, long look at the cross; compare the love of Christ with the way that you're living your life. The cross has a way of humbling us and convicting us of sin. We've all grievously fallen short of the glory of God. We all deserve to be lost, but the Lord out of love paid the price to rescue us.

Perhaps you feel like David. King David saw Bathsheba taking a bath, and apparently she was unclothed. Being tempted, he sent for Bathsheba and the Bible said that he slept with her. When Bathsheba found that she was pregnant with David's child, David then plotted to bring Uriah the Hittite back to cover up his sin. He tried this and that, but all of them failed. So, what he eventually did was that he had Uriah killed in battle and then he married his widow to try and cover things up. David's sin, however, caught up with him. Second Samuel 12:1-6 says: "Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and he said, 'There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb, which he bought and nourished; And it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, And it was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, And he was unwilling to take from

his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

“Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the LORD lives, surely this man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and he had no compassion.’”

I suspect that if I were David and heard such a story, I too would be angry at this selfish and unjust behavior! David had felt the pain of his sin but thought he had covered it up so no one else would know. What Nathan said next must have stunned David.

Nathan then said to David (this is in verses 7 to 9), “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?’”

The most important day of our lives comes when we realize that we too have sinned and we need a Savior. We may not have been an adulterer or a killer like David, but our sins are still real. They can deceive us; they can harden our hearts; they can cost us our souls. We need a Savior! We need Someone who will step in to rescue us, who will pay the price for our sins. That's what the cross is all about. That is why He died upon the cross! First Peter 2:24 says, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” If you need spiritual healing, look to the cross where Jesus is lifted up and come to Him, penitent and obedient!

We live in a confusing world with many competing voices, each crying out with a different message. How can we know what is true? Some, today, are like Pontius Pilate, who asked Jesus, “What is truth?” If Pilate had been listening more closely to Jesus, he would have found the answer to that question. Jesus told Pilate, “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. And everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37). The way to the truth is Jesus Christ. You can trust Him! You will not be deceived or fooled.

Jesus' actions shout that He is real and genuine. His empty tomb cries out that He did indeed rise from the dead. If Jesus arose from the dead, then He truly is Lord and the Son of God. We can trust His words. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). He promised in John 8:31-32, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” In our confused world, it's reassuring to know the One who is the Truth! By His Word, we can know right and wrong. By His Word, we can know what's true and what's false!

If you believe in Jesus Christ and you love Him for dying on the cross, repent of every sin, confess Him as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water. When you're baptized, God will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16); He'll add you to His church (Acts 2:47); He'll make you His child (Galatians 3:27); and He'll raise you up to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). So, obey the Lord today!

Pleasing God

Each day we're choosing what is important to us. Who are you pleasing? Who is important to you? Today, we're going to explore the need to please God. The Scriptures teach us how to please God and to be good to our fellow man. Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The Word of God is good. We should welcome the benefits it brings to our lives. If you want to be a better person, follow the perfect standard found in God's Word.

Each day we're choosing what matters and the direction of our lives. Some choose a broad path, while others choose the narrow way. The Lord Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The broad way is popular and easy. It attracts lots of people, but they may not know their destiny. The things that seem attractive and popular may be destructive.

Jesus urges us to choose the small gate and the narrow way that leads to life. The choice is whether to follow the crowd or to follow Jesus. Choose Jesus, because He alone can lead you to eternal life. The apostle Paul asked, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). What are you choosing?

Our reading today comes from 2 Corinthians 5:6-9. "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." I hope that's your ambition too, to be pleasing to Him. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful for Your Word that teaches us how to love You and how to serve You. Help us to be good servants and to love You always. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!

The Lord Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:28-29). Jesus lived to please His Father in heaven. He was entirely unselfish. He gave up everything to do the Father's will and to save mankind from sin.

Because our world leads us often to be self-centered, we find it hard to understand how anybody could devote himself totally to the will and pleasure of someone else. Many think that the only way to happiness is to be their own master and to serve no one. They think selfish ambition will lead them to greatness. They may even suppose the rules apply to everyone else, but not to them. The Lord Jesus, who has passed through the heavens, and is the King of kings and Lord of lords, however, chose to be a servant.

The Lord explained to his disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). The Lord Jesus saw

greatness not in possessions or power but in service and sacrifice.

So, we must ask ourselves, “how do we please God?” The Scriptures give us the answer. First, we must place our faith in God. Hebrews 11:1-2 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it (that is, by faith) the men of old gained approval.” The blessing of God comes only to those who believe. Hebrews 11:6 says, “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.” You cannot expect to please God if you refuse to believe in Him or in what He teaches. Believing in God means believing what God says. You believe what He teaches and you’re willing to obey His instructions.

Second, we cannot love sin and practice sin and still please God. First John 2:15-17 says, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; and the one who does the will of God lives forever.” Each day we’re choosing whether we’re going to follow our passions and the love of this world or whether we’re going to follow the Lord and love Him.

The world tells us that we may pursue whatever fleshly passion that we desire. But just because the world says something is okay doesn’t mean God is pleased by it. Romans 8:5-8 says, “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it doesn’t subject itself to the law of God, for it’s not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” You can’t continue following the pleasures of the flesh and think God won’t mind. He knows your heart, and a mind set on the flesh cannot please God.

So, Paul urges us, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Galatians 5:16-17). When people follow the flesh and the world, they actually make themselves an enemy of God according to James 4:4. Following the world will do nothing but ruin your life and your soul. Galatians 5:24 says, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” My friend, do you follow Christ or do you follow your passions?

Third, we must love God more than others. The Lord Jesus said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:37-39). The Lord expects us to put Him first in all things, even before our loved ones. We may have a family member who challenges our devotion to Christ. We cannot let our love for anyone in our family lead us astray from God or from His teaching. If we let people come between God and ourselves, we’re not worthy of Christ. Though we are to love all people, even our enemies, we must love Christ even more.

John tells of some Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus but loved their friends more than they loved God. John 12:42-43 says, “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put

out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.” They believed, but were unwilling to confess it openly. They didn’t want to lose their status in the community. So, they feared the Pharisees more than God and loved their place in the community more than the approval of God.

Fourth, we must love Christ more than our heritage. Paul is the perfect example of someone who gave up everything in his past in order to follow Christ. He said, “If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me (he says), those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:4-8).

Paul left his place in Judaism to become a Christian. He “was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Galatians 1:14). But, all that heritage, all of it couldn’t do what Christ could do for him. He wanted Christ! He wanted to be right with God! My friend, do you?

Fifth, we need to worship the Lord in the way that pleases Him, not ourselves. Worship by its very nature is a means of honoring, praising, and showing respect for the Person that we worship. We want God to be pleased with our sacrifices. Hebrews 13:15-16 says, “Through Him (that is, through Christ) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” God wants His people to offer their hearts, their lips, and their lives in worship to Him.

God accepted the worship that Abel offered, but He refused to accept Cain or his sacrifices. Hebrews 11:4 explains, “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.” Abel’s gift was by faith, while Cain’s gifts lacked that quality. We need faith in God when we worship. That means that we listen to His instructions, His commandments, and do them. We don’t know all the differences between Cain and Abel, but we do know that Cain didn’t have the faith in God that he needed to please God.

Worshippers in Isaiah’s time thought they could live any way they pleased and God would accept their prayers. We find these words in Isaiah 1:15-17: “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, (God says) I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.” Their immoral and wicked lives made their worship unacceptable to God. Only when they repented would God hear their prayers and accept their worship.

Sixth, we must not let other interests interfere with our service to God. The apostle Paul told the young preacher Timothy, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, you entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with

me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:1-4).

We can get so busy with our own lives that we forget our commitment to God. The Lord Jesus described how some hearts were like seed sown on thorny soil. He said, “The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). You can hardly serve the Lord when you allow every wind that blows to come before Him, and His instructions, and the way He wants you to live, and going to church. Whenever you let other things interfere with your serving God, then you really can't please Him.

Seventh, God is pleased when His people obey Him. God told Saul to go and utterly destroy all the Amalekites and all of their livestock, but Saul failed to obey God. He brought back King Agag; and the best of the sheep and oxen to offer up as sacrifices. God regretted that He had made Saul king, because He turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commandments. Saul feared the people and forgot about God. When he was confronted, the prophet Samuel said, “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). Obeying God means doing His will, pleasing Him, and serving Him the way that He instructs. Look at your life, look at your attitudes! Are you, pleasing to God? Let's pray together. O, Father help us to humble our hearts in love toward You. And to serve You, our great and matchless God of Heaven. And to serve Your Son Jesus who died for us. And, Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Second Corinthians 5:6-9 says, “Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we're absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we're of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.” What is your ambition? How badly do you want to be right with God? How badly do you want to be free from sin? How badly do you want to be “at home with the Lord”?

God wants you to come home to Him and live with Him forever. He sent Jesus to the cross so you could be saved. God loves you and wants to forgive you. That love and grace of God calls you to respond to Him in faith and love. Love for God means that you'll see your sins differently than you did in years past. You'll wish you had never committed them and don't ever want to commit them again. It's that penitent, contrite heart that pleases God. David said about God, “For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You're not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17).

God wants to forgive you. Trust in Him, trust in His Word; and repent of your sins and turn to the Lord; confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and be baptized into Christ. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water. When you're baptized, you can enjoy God's gift of forgiveness. You can be a child of God and an heir of heaven. Why wait even another day to get right with God? There's no better day than today to make your calling and election sure!

Where is God?

Some folks think God is absent in our world today; others say that God is dead. Is God alive and active in the world today and working for our good? We want to know all we can about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; and the way to know God is through a study of His Word, the Bible. So, we go again and again to Scripture.

How we view God matters greatly in how we view life and how we understand our purpose and role in this world. An atheist does not believe God exists at all. An agnostic says he doesn't know whether God exists, because he thinks God is unknowable. Some believe God got the world going and then abandoned it. Others hold that belief in God was relevant in ancient times, but God is now dead. We no longer need God in our lives today according to them.

Several years ago in graduate school, I spent a couple of semesters studying skeptics and atheists. One thing I found was that skepticism and atheism grew more out of an attitude than it did out of evidence. Atheists and skeptics tended to focus on the disorder and the ugly in life. They seemed to ignore the order, the beauty, the grandeur, and the wisdom so evident in our universe. They were intelligent people, but they missed the intelligent design that's all around us. I'm amazed at how easily people can slip into a very narrow view of life and of God. Some folks close their eyes and their minds to the beauty of God and see only the evil and the ugly. God is good and actively blesses us every day. Thankfully, we can know Him and what He's done for us to bless us and give us eternal life.

Our reading today comes from the book of Proverbs 3:5-7. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." Let's pray together. Father, we're so grateful that You are so trustworthy and that we can put ourselves into Your hands, day to day. Father, we know that You're with us and that You help us. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Paul said, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19). God wants our hearts to be open to His power. God's power towards us who believe is greater than we think!

Have you ever experienced an "aha!" moment—awakening to something that's a great truth that had eluded you? That's what Paul wanted for the Ephesians. He wanted them to understand what God causes to happen—God is at work! God has great power—and His power works in the lives of His people.

You might ask how God is at work. He's working in a variety of ways. First, God works in the universe. As a prophet, King David said, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). One can hardly look at the beauty, the order, and the wisdom of the universe and not see how wise and how powerful God is. The God who makes the sun shine and flowers bloom, the God who regulates times and seasons has such great power and wisdom that it's truly beyond our understanding. Paul proclaimed: "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you

rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:16-17). All that we have, all our blessings come from God!

Jesus is not only our Creator, He’s also the one who keeps this world together. Colossians 1:15-17 says, “And He (speaking of Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” God’s power and wisdom cause our seasons, cause the earth to rotate every 24 hours making night and day, cause the moon to revolve around the earth every 28 days and control the tides of the ocean, and cause the earth to go around the sun every 365 and one fourth days determining our year and our seasons. This could not just happen on its own; God has been in control.

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). We’re blessed to have food to eat each day, food that God provides. Have you ever thought about the power of one seed planted in the ground? One kernel of corn planted in the ground, watered, and fertilized can produce an ear of corn with sixteen rows and 800 kernels. Many cornstalks will have more than one ear! God created that kernel of corn with the information and the ability to reproduce itself that way.

God is indeed powerful! The Lord Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; and he doesn’t know how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:27-29). God has been taking care of us in marvelous ways for a very long time.

Second, God is at work in your salvation. God sent His Son to die upon the cross; God through the Holy Spirit inspired men to write the Bible including the gospel, which has the power to save; and Christ built His church, who are the saved. From the very beginning, God has been working toward your salvation and mine. The apostle Paul by inspiration said, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you’ve been saved) and He raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Ephesians 2:4-9).

The salvation that we enjoy through Christ was not easy. It’s the gift of God, and for that we are thankful. But great gifts are not cheap, and our redemption came at a price greater than silver or gold. God sacrificed his Son Jesus, and Jesus sacrificed His body on the cross for you and me. We must not take our salvation for granted or treat it lightly as if it were trivial. People who mock the Lord, people who ignore the cross, or criticize the church are usually unthankful for what God has done to save them. They don’t realize what He sacrificed to give them eternal life. The Bible is the message of that life. Without the message of the Bible, we would all be in great peril—without hope and without God in this present world.

The Bible teaches us how to come to Christ, and how the blood of Christ cleanses us, and how we can have new life with Christ. The Bible says, “having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who

raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions” (Colossians 2:12-13). You may not realize it, but it is God who is “at work” in baptism.

In baptism, God unites us with Christ; God washes away our sins; God takes away that old man of sin; God buries us with Christ; and God raises us up from spiritual death to newness of life. In baptism, God adds us to the church and God makes us His children. Oh, God is very busy working on us in baptism. For this reason, I cannot quite understand why anybody would say baptism is unnecessary for our salvation. Baptism is when God works on us.

God doesn't forget us once we're saved. Every Christian sins, and that's unfortunate. Christians wish they could keep from sinning, because they love God and they hate it when they sin and they want to stop it afterward. God knows that we're weak, but He's also provided for our weaknesses. The Bible says, “Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). That's what Jesus is doing right now for us. He's interceding with the Father on our behalf, asking the Father to forgive us and to continue blessing us, even when we have sinned. Oh, I am so thankful for the Lord who loves me enough to pray for me.

Third, God is at work answering prayer. The Bible says, “It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24). God wants to hear your prayers. In fact, He invites you to pray to Him. The Bible says, “Every good thing bestowed 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 loves us enough to hear our prayers and to help us when we need Him. The apostle Paul reminds us, “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding 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” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Fourth, God is busy shaping our lives. He works in us. The Bible says, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Yes, God prepares His people to do His work, so that we may live for an eternity in heaven with Him. What God is doing in us now prepares us for the life to come. The Bible says, “So then, my beloved, just as you've always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). God is shaping our hearts, our attitudes, our will, and our lives to conform to His will, so that we might live with Him always.

God also saved us so that we might be His servants, doing good works and impacting the world for love and righteousness. The Bible says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). So much good is being done in the world because of the love of God and the teaching of the Bible: Christians feed the hungry; they take care of widows and orphans; they help unwed mothers; they provide help to the lonely and homeless; and they point sinners to righteousness.

I saw a book written by a skeptic, called *The God Problem*. His subtitle suggested that God never addresses the problem of evil in the Bible. I wondered which Bible he was reading from because it's not the Bible that I've spent my life studying. God knows all about our suffering,

and the cross of Christ demonstrates God's willingness to suffer for us. Romans 8:28 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." God doesn't stop every event of suffering, but God does use even suffering to work for our good. We don't always understand what God is doing or why; but we know that God loves us and will use every circumstance in our lives, pleasing or painful, to work for good in some way. We can trust God!

The sweet psalmist of Israel, David, who was inspired of God, said, "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).

God has been working in our lives a very long time. He isn't hidden, but we do get distracted by life and sometimes we're unable to see what He's doing. The Bible reminds us of all the good that God is doing for us and in us. Paul said, "And now I commend you 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). Oh, God's Word is far from being harmful. It's the source of love and life and good and righteousness. Oh, we need the Bible every day to help us grow and to live as God intended. Let's pray together. O, Father, help us every day to love You more and to see how You're working in our lives. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!

I join Paul in His prayer in Ephesians 1:18-19: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." God can work in your life, IF you let Him. He won't twist your arm; He won't make you do anything. But if you out of love put your life into His hands, God can do amazing things.

It's not the power of God that is lacking. It's not the willingness of God to work in our lives that is lacking. What is lacking is our willingness to let God into our hearts and our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." You've got to trust Him and let Him work in you. God desires that we believe in Jesus Christ enough to obey Him and to trust His promises.

That starts by trusting Him enough to repent of your sins and confess the name of Christ before others. Christ doesn't want a secret disciple. He wants you to confess with your mouth that He is your Lord and that you believe He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. After you've repented and made that confession, God wants you to be baptized into Christ, where God cleanses you with the blood of Jesus and makes you into one of His own children. Won't you do that today? Won't you obey the gospel and put the Lord first? Will you let God work in your life?

Jesus Blesses Us

The Scriptures reveal several reasons why Jesus came into this world, and each of those reasons describes a blessing for mankind. The Lord's coming into the world touches each of our lives and opens up a wonderful way for us to know God.

The Bible teaches us the truth that we need to know, the truth that we must know. That's why we keep studying this marvelous book. We work to bring interested people to the Lord Jesus and to His Word, the Bible. God's Word has all the answers for our spiritual lives. It teaches us where we came from, why we're here, and where we're going after we die. The Bible is God's marvelous resource for us. It gives us all the information that we need to know for life and godliness. It brings us to Jesus and teaches us how to live so that we might please Him.

Of all our blessings, nothing could be more important than having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Someday this earth and all it possesses will be burned up and destroyed. What will matter on that day is your spiritual relationship with God, the God who loves you and gave His Son, Jesus, to die for your sins. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of love, of righteousness, of service, and of obedience. Because of Jesus, we can know the truth, and the truth can set us free (John 8:32). Because of Jesus, we have hope and peace and a future.

We need Jesus Christ in this generation as much as any generation could. I cringe when I think of people mocking Jesus or ignoring Him. How foolish to turn down an opportunity to know and follow the Son of God! Jesus came into this world to bless us, you and me. I don't want you to miss out, and I don't want to miss out. I want you to have every blessing in Christ.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to John 1:9-13. "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You gave us the opportunity to be born again because of Jesus and because of His coming into the world. Father, help us to know Him and to love Him. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

I'm deeply grateful that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. Our lives would be immeasurably poorer if Jesus had not come. We can know so many things that we wouldn't have known, because Jesus came. We can have a close, loving relationship with the Father, because of Jesus. We have a living hope beyond this grave, because of Jesus. We have a home in heaven forever and ever, because of Jesus. Today, we'll explore five reasons why Jesus came into the world. These are not the only reasons, but they are vitally important to our spiritual well-being.

First, Jesus came into the world so that we might know God. The Bible says, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:17-18). Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him" (John 14:6-7).

Second, Jesus came into the world so that we might know God's will for our lives. John 3:1-

2 says: "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; and this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs (that is, miracles) that You do unless God is with him.'" Jesus was first and foremost a teacher; He wanted people not only to know God but to know the will of God. So Jesus held this teaching to be essential to us. John 6:63 says, "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

We must know and obey the words of the Lord. The Lord Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

You cannot say no to the teaching of the Lord without saying no to the Lord Himself. Jesus wanted us to know His teaching because it will be the basis for our judgment on the Last Day. Jesus took special care to deliver the teaching accurately and faithfully. The Lord said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me" (John 12:48-50).

When the Bible teaches something, you can be sure it's what the Lord Jesus wants us to know. Don't trust your feelings, or your assumptions, or the teachings of men, or anything but what you can read in your New Testament. The only way that you can know the will of the Father for sure is by looking at the words of Jesus Christ.

Third, Jesus came into the world so that we might have a relationship with God. The Bible says, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). God wants everybody to come to Him and to be His child, but not everyone wants to do His will.

God will forgive anyone's sin who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of sin, and be baptized. The gospel is for all, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave or free. Anyone who loves the Lord and is willing to obey Him can be saved and become a child of God. The apostle Peter said to the Roman Gentile, Cornelius, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

People who claim to be close to the Lord but are unwilling to do the will of God fool themselves. You can't continue to live in rebellion to the will of God and then expect to have a positive relationship with the Lord. The Lord wants to draw close to you; but if you reject His will, you're rejecting Him, and His blessing.

Fourth, Jesus came into the world so that we might be saved. In Matthew 1:21, an angel of the Lord told Joseph about Mary: "she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." In John 1:29, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that

whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This passage has so much to say about God’s love for us. The Father loved us enough to sacrifice His Son, Jesus, on the cross so that we might have forgiveness of sins and become children of God; to me, this is amazing. God gave up His Son to a crucifixion, the worst and most shameful death that a man could endure. He did it because He truly loved us and truly hated what sin has done and would do to us. He gave Jesus as the only way to atone for our sins.

In Luke 19, the New Testament tells the story of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, the wee little man who followed Jesus. When the people grumbled that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner, Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9-10). The Lord Jesus has graced the lives of so many sinners, people who thought they would forever be enslaved to a life for which they are ashamed. The Lord gives us hope that we can change and be freed from the guilt and the hold of sin over our lives.

On another occasion when Jesus was eating with tax-collectors and sinners, the Pharisees asked His disciples, “‘Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?’ But when Jesus heard this, He said, ‘It’s not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But you go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners”” (Matthew 9:11-13).

Jesus went where the need was greatest, to those who needed Him most. He wasn’t like the Pharisees who thought they were better than others; He wanted to heal the spiritual diseases of people. He knew everyone had a soul, and so He didn’t pick and choose which people He liked and ignore the rest. He loved everybody and suffered on the cross for every person.

Many believe the Lord predestined or arbitrarily chose which people He would save and which would be lost. Because of this false teaching, and it is false teaching, some believe that they can’t ever be right with the Lord, no matter what. I tell you, nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus loves everybody and He died for the sins of every person.

Titus 2:11 says, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men (all people).” Those who say Jesus shed His blood only for the elect, or the saved, contradict the Word of God. The inspired apostle John wrote to the elect in the church that Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). The Lord’s heart is not small; He has a place in His heart for you, my friend.

The apostle Paul, who described himself as the chief of sinners, realized that God’s grace was greater than his sins. He said, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

Jesus came to this earth to die. He was born with a body, a body destined to sacrifice for the sins of the world. Hebrews 10:4-7 says: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

Jesus Christ gladly suffered and sacrificed His life so that we might live with Him for eternity. The Lord said, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I

may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:17-18). Jesus Christ gave His body and His life as an act of great, personal love for you and for me.

Fifth, Jesus came into the world to give us an abundant life. The Lord Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This promise of God has proven true on so many levels. The Lord Jesus has given us an abundant life here and will provide for us a home in heaven. Ephesians 1:3 reminds us that God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Oh, God hears our prayers; God grants us forgiveness and peace; God gives us living hope through the resurrection of Jesus; and God gives us His Word, the Bible, to instruct and guide us, and to encourage us each day.

Jesus blesses us so richly that I cannot imagine even one day apart from the Lord. Spiritual death takes place when a person sins against God. The word “death” describes a separation. Physical death, according to James 2:26, is the separation of the physical body from the spirit. Spiritual death takes place when we sin against God and separate ourselves from God. Jesus died to reconcile us, to bring us back together with God. The blood of Jesus atones for our sins and allows us to come back into the grace and favor of God our Father. His blood opens the door for us to live as children of God and to have hope in the hereafter. My friend, don't let a single day, not a single hour, pass without the blessing of Jesus Christ in Your life. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we're thankful for Jesus, that He came into this world, that He suffered and died for us, and blessed us with so many good things. Father, help us to love You and to love Him. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

When I think about Jesus Christ coming into this world, I recall the time that my wife Jackie and I visited Israel. We saw much of the nation. We especially liked our trip to the northern town of Banias, what the Bible calls Caesarea Philippi. The New Testament records a heart-searching question, a question that we must also ask ourselves. The Bible says: “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ And He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’” (Matthew 16:13-15).

Who is Jesus to you? How do you regard Him? That may be the most important question you ever answer. Some today say that He was only a man; others say that He was only a prophet; and still others say that He was a great moral teacher. Peter answered Jesus by saying, “You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God.” Can you say that too? Is He your Lord? Do you say that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God? If we obey the Lord and commit our lives to Him, we can enjoy His blessings. If we turn Him down, we'll lose the blessing that He came to give.

You can commit your life to Him by loving Him with all your heart, placing your faith in Him as the Christ, turning away from all sin, and then committing yourself to live as He wills, and by being baptized into Christ. Baptism is the immersion in water of a repentant believer. When you're baptized God washes away your sins (Acts 22:16). He gives you newness of life (Romans 6:4). My friend, today is the best day for you to commit your life to God.