

# *Program Transcripts*

For November 2017



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**November 2017**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **NOVEMBER 5 – GOD’S ENDURING WORD**

The Bible is an ancient book, but its message is relevant and authoritative today. Whatever was written in ancient time was written for our learning. In this message, we’re going to look at the authority of God’s Word.

## **NOVEMBER 12 – ONLY ONE LIFE**

You have only one life; what are you doing with it? Some use their lives to make a difference in this world, while others are only chasing after a wind. In this lesson, we’re going to see how we can make our lives matter.

## **NOVEMBER 19 – BE THANKFUL**

The heart of Christianity begins with counting our blessings and being grateful for everything God has done for us. Let us consider our spiritual and physical blessings, and may they move us to commit ourselves to the Lord.

## **NOVEMBER 26 – A CHRISTIAN**

Who and what is a Christian? People often misunderstand what a Christian is by looking at people who call themselves Christians but fail to live as God wills. How does God define a Christian and what does He wish from us?

## God's Enduring Word

The Bible is an ancient book, but its message is relevant and authoritative today. Today, we're going to look at the authority of God's Word. We want to know what God desires for us and requires of us. We don't want to be deceived by popular opinions or follow the broad path to destruction. We want to know the Lord Jesus and to enjoy the promises that He makes to those who follow Him. God is good, and we want to imitate Him. The Bible teaches us how to be like Him and the things that we must avoid.

Though the Bible is an ancient book, it contains God's vital message for us. We cannot afford to ignore it. The New Testament reveals what God has done for us and contains the commands that God requires of us. The grace of God is a wondrous blessing, but God's grace challenges us to turn to righteousness. Titus 2:11-12 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Grace doesn't excuse us from responsibility; it obligates us to change our hearts and be God's people!

The more that we know about God's goodness and love, the more we wish we were like Him. The more we count our blessings, the more we want to thank Him for what He has done. This appreciation of God's goodness leads us to repent, to change our lives. We can't stand in the shadow of the cross and still love sin and error. The cross leads us to love the Lord and the truth that He teaches. We can know the Lord by studying His teaching, His Word, the Bible. That's the key to loving Him.

Our scripture reading today comes from 2 Timothy 3:12-17.

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

That's a reading from God's Holy Word about what the Bible can do for you.

Let's have a heart to heart talk today and think about how we see the Bible. The Word of God is your key to understanding the will of God. Because it is the inspired Word of God, you can trust it to tell you the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts; but I'd rather hear the truth that stings for a moment than listen to a lie that causes me suffering for eternity. I'd rather change my thinking in this life than to find I was deceived in the life to come.

What I think of the Bible reveals what I think of the God of the Bible, who created me and to Whom I am accountable. When people dismiss the Bible as an irrelevant book, they're dismissing the Lord Jesus also. I hear some say they want Jesus but they do not want the Bible. The Lord Jesus said, "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).

Perhaps one reason that people don't want to look into the Scriptures is that they see themselves as they are morally and spiritually. They may not like what they see. James urged, "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the

implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:21-25).

When people both hear and do the will of God, they find the blessing that God intended. The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28). They are the wise ones who build their houses on the rock and stand in times of testing according to Matthew 7:24-25. The Lord Jesus approves of them. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, “Although He was a son, (speaking of Jesus) He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” When you obey His wWords, you’re obeying Him!

Occasionally I hear charges against the Bible that are unfounded. First, speaking of the New Testament, some say, “God didn’t give us a book of laws.” Really? I realize the New Testament is not primarily a book of commandments, but it certainly does have laws and commands! Paul said, “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (that is, the law of Moses) (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

Paul always considered himself under the law of Christ. He said, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Paul is not alone. James 1:25 says, “But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” Yes, the New Testament is a law; but it’s a perfect law of liberty. Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). God’s Word sets us free from sin, free from the consequences of sin, and free to live righteous lives. That is a blessing! It is a law of liberty.

We call Jesus “Lord.” How can He be Lord and yet have no commandments? How can He rule if there are no rules? Some say the Bible is just merely a love letter, but it is much, much more. Let’s consider the imperatives in the New Testament; one student found more than 1200 imperatives. An imperative is a command. Some commands are positive, telling us to behave in a certain way; while others are negative, instructing us to avoid or to stop a certain practice. These imperatives function as laws or commands. They aren’t suggestions; they are God’s requirements. Obviously, we must consider the context and the ones to whom the command was given; but this doesn’t mean that God spoke them needlessly. They matter to God and should matter to us!

The New Testament distinguishes the way people live outside of Christ and the way they should live inside of Christ. People who know and practice the way of Christ enjoy the promises of Christ. Ephesians 4:17-24 says, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to

their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” This passage in Ephesians is still true today. Truth is still in Jesus! If we want true righteousness and true holiness, if we want to rise above darkness, and if we want the words of eternal life, we must come to Jesus.

Second, some say the New Testament instructions went out of use with the passage of time. They were once binding, but times have changed and they aren't binding now. I call this the “cultural argument.” Christ once spoke against a moral or religious practice in the minds in an ancient culture; but since we live in a different culture, His teaching no longer applies to us today. That's the “cultural argument” that people hear. This argument simply isn't true. What God called immoral in the first century is still immoral today. The practices God demanded or forbade in the first century, He still does. Psalm 119:89 says, “Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.” God's Word doesn't change with the passing of time. The Lord Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

First Peter 1:23-25 says, “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you.” God's Word cannot perish and it cannot change!

The Lord Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus commissioned His followers to preach the one true gospel to every person in every culture, in every nation, and in every age.

God calls everyone to repent. No one can ignore this call. “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31). Peter assures us, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

No generation can exempt itself from accountability to the Lord. No generation can tell God to just hush and to leave us alone. When generations in the past abandoned God's way to follow their own ways, they found that course led to their destruction. The history of Israel reveals that popular opinions cannot turn sin into righteousness. When Israel despised God's statutes, and they embraced idolatry to be like nations that surrounded them, they found out that they couldn't dismiss God so easily. God judged them (2 Kings 17:14-18).

We must realize that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. God gave Him all authority over every nation and every culture in every age. The Father has given all things into the hands of the Son (John 3:35). Hebrews 4:13 says, “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

At the end of time, all nations will gather before the judgment seat of Christ. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31-32). Those who obey Him will enjoy eternal life, and those who ignore Him will face eternal punishment (verse 46).

Revelation 20:12-13 explains even more about the Judgment, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.” Jesus will judge us by the things written in the books, not by culture. What was written in the first century will judge us! The universal character of the cross, the gospel, repentance, the church, and the judgment permeate Scripture. Jesus is the Lord of all flesh (John 17:3); He reigns over every person in every culture in every age; and there is no exception.

You can now see that the passage of time does not change God's Words. What was true in the first century is still true today. What God required of the church in the first century, He requires of us today.

Someone said that facts are stubborn things; they are true whether people believe them or not. Whether a culture accepts or rejects Jesus as Lord doesn't change the fact that He is our creator and will judge all people in every age and everywhere. Belief or disbelief doesn't establish a fact and it doesn't erase the truth. Fact is fact regardless of cultural perception.

Since Jesus is your Creator and the One who will judge you by His Words on the last day, shouldn't you give serious thought to what He says? If He has the words of eternal life, shouldn't you give serious thought to what He says? If Jesus sacrificed His blood on the cross to bring you forgiveness of sins, shouldn't you give serious thought to what He says?

I hear people say, “I don't like doctrine.” Doctrine is merely teaching; it's God telling us what's right and true. We all need teaching to know what is true and how to live. Others say, “Phil, don't you know that doctrine is divisive?” Is it really? You know it's not God's teaching that divides; it's the spirit of wanting something different than God's teaching that causes confusion and conflict. Division comes from people wanting to add to God's teaching or to take away from God's teaching. Division comes when people listen more to worldly cultures than to God Himself. They listen to human traditions rather than to God's Word. When people follow their desires or some human idea rather than listen to God's instructions, they follow that broad path that leads to destruction. You cannot draw close to God if you count other voices as more important than His voice. This is why we urge you to listen to the voice of God in every matter.

This is why we go to the New Testament itself for what we teach. We know faith, love, repentance, confessing Christ, and baptism are essential to salvation. We know baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. So, we cannot follow the changes the religious world allows; so, we don't sprinkle infants who neither believe nor are in sin. The grace of God leads us to follow the Scriptures without adding or subtracting anything. My friend, do you follow the Lord?

## Only One Life

You have only one life; what are you doing with it? Does your life matter, or are you chasing after the wind? The Bible teaches us how to live an abundant life. It helps us to distinguish what's wise from what's foolish, what's important from what doesn't matter; what's good from what's evil. You can search the world over and never find a book that will bless you like the Bible.

Living without God's teaching in your life is like sewing with a needle that has no thread or like writing your biography with a pen empty of ink. Some years ago psychologist William Marston asked 3000 people, "What do you have to live for?" He found that 94% were simply enduring the present while waiting for the future. They were waiting for something to happen someday. They wanted to finish school, or watch their children grow up, or take a long vacation, or retire. They were waiting, not realizing that all anyone ever has is today, because yesterday is gone and tomorrow is only a hope.

Solomon said, "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). You might look at your life and wonder what difference you've made in this world. Is your life merely a striving after wind?

C. T. Studd, nearly a hundred years ago, wrote two lines that make one pause and consider what matters in life. He wrote "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Because there's more to life than the here and now, we must consider our eternal destiny and what matters when this life is over.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:15-21.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

God gives us life one day at a time, and it's brief. Jacob, when he was 130 years old, told Pharaoh, "few and unpleasant have been the years of my life" (Genesis 47:9). One hundred and thirty years still seems long to me, but Jacob called them "few." David said, "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath" (Psalm 39:4-5).

How we live matters, and whether we remember God through our lives is crucial to how we spend eternity. The Preacher, Solomon, wrote, "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

We must take notice of God's Word where he says, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So

then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17). I’d like to suggest some things that we must take time to do:

First, take time to listen. God said through the prophet Isaiah, “Incline your ear, and come to Me: hear and your soul shall live” (Isaiah 55:3). Above anyone else, we must listen to God and hear His voice in all matters. The psalmist said, “Thy testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors” (Psalm 119:24). God’s Word always gives the best counsel, because God has no limits to His wisdom. God’s Word is also a blessing in hard times. Psalm 119:50 says, “This is my comfort in my affliction, That Thy word has revived me.” Again, in verse 52, “I have remembered Thine ordinances from of old, O LORD, And comfort myself.”

Psalm 1 says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

The Scriptures also encourage us to listen to others, to wise people. Everyone needs a listening ear at times. Listening is the first step to loving. Listening encourages and solves problems; it brings comfort and it brings healing. Your life will be richer by far the more you learn to listen. Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory.” Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.” Getting godly and wise advice can make the difference between success and failure. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Second, take time to learn. I don’t know everything that I want to know, for sure; but I suspect you feel that way too at times. Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.” I want to know what God says. Psalm 119:98-99 says, “Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation.” God gives us true wisdom that guides us now and leads us to eternal life.

Psalm 119:133 says, “Establish my footsteps in Thy word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.” We need to know what will bless us and what will hurt us.

The Lord Jesus promises, "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17). The more you put God’s Word into practice, the more you realize the Bible truly is from God Himself.

The Scriptures teach us how to think, how to deal with others, and how to behave. Paul said, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Could you say that? Could you encourage others to live like you live, to think like you think, or to treat others the way you treat them? When we follow Christ, we know we’re doing the right thing. You can study many things, but only knowledge of God can give you eternal life. How sad to think that many people are brilliant when it comes to earthly things but know nearly nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Third, take time to laugh and rejoice. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.” Many people have forgotten how to laugh or enjoy life. Their lives are sad, dreary, and drab. We should learn to laugh at ourselves, to enjoy others without embarrassing them, and especially to rejoice in the Lord! Paul, while in chains, wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). He found a way to find joy in life even in the harshest of circumstances.

Rejoicing is not merely being happy. Rejoicing comes from something lasting and precious. Ezra 8:10 says, “the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Because we know the Lord, we can rejoice in all His promises and blessings. This joy gives us strength, hope, and promise. After love, joy is the second quality of the fruit of the Spirit. The more we count our blessings, the more that we’ll find joy in life. God is the giver of all good gifts. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” God gives us every good thing that we need. Let’s learn to rejoice every day. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Fourth, take time to lift others. There are many sad things happening all around us, calling for us to lend a hand. Mark 9 tells of the boy who was afflicted with a demon that made him deaf and mute. This demon often caused him to have convulsions and be thrown into the fire and the water. When Jesus commanded the demon to come out of him, the boy convulsed on the ground and lay motionless like he was dead. Verse 27 says, “But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up.” Jesus gave him the help that he needed. Jesus forgave sin, gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, raised the dead, and gave hope to the poor (Luke 4:17-21). He blessed everyone He came in contact with.

Galatians 6:2 urges us, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” There are still many surrounding us who need a helping hand of kindness. Many people are too busy with personal pursuits and pleasures to lift the less fortunate; but the more we bless others, the more we find blessing. Send a note, make a phone call, give a compliment, smile, encourage, and show that you care! First Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” You have “only one life; ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Fifth, take time to love. First John 4:16 says, “God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” The man who doesn’t love is not alive—he’s just merely existing. Everybody needs love and to be loved. First Corinthians 13:1-3 says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

Because Jesus loved us, we can know how to love others. First John 3:16-18 says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

I have a dear friend who lost his wife a few years ago. Each time we meet, Jasper reminds

me to treasure and spend time with my wife and my loved ones while I can. I know he's right. It's time to love our families and our neighbors as ourselves. Today is all you have; all any of us have. When you take time to love, you're serving God. More than anything, we need to love God and love other people! Colossians 3:12-14 says, "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." Beyond all, put on love. "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last."

If your life isn't what you want it to be, today is the best day to change. You can begin today to listen, learn, laugh, lift, and love! You can become the salt and the light of the world by becoming a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through" Him (John 14:6). The Lord Jesus came that you "may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Don't waste your life chasing after dreams in the here and now and then miss heaven. If you place all your hopes on your passions and your pleasures in this life, they will soon disappear; but if you place your hope in the Lord, you can find eternal blessings in this life and the life to come.

Isaiah 1:18-20 says, "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." In Christ, we have hope that we can be forgiven, that we can transform our lives into the kind of people that God can use to bless the whole world. You only have one life, and it will not last on this earth forever. Serve the Lord and make the most of your days! The most important things in life are always expensive; but there is a far greater cost to doing nothing and being unprepared. Life is brief; and as we age, each year passes more quickly than the last one. This means what matters becomes more and more urgent. Cougan Collins recently asked, "If you knew the day you would die, would that change the way that you live?"

There are many uncertainties in life, and we can't foresee what the future holds; but you must prepare for at least one divine appointment. One day you'll stand before the throne of God to give an account for your life. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10). What do you see when you look at yourself? Are you the person that God could honor? Are you living for the Lord or are you chasing after the wind? Don't waste your life with the things that don't matter. Build your house upon the rock by listening to the Lord Jesus and doing what He says! Make your life count for eternity!

The best thing you can do is to place your faith in Christ Jesus who created you. Since you're made in the image of God, let God work in and through you to make a difference in this world. Trust in the Lord and in His words and promises. Turn from sin and follow the Lord in repentance. Confess to everyone that you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and let others know that you belong to Him. Upon confession, be baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Act 2:38). Your commitment to follow Jesus will be the most important decision that you'll ever make. So do it today!

## Be Thankful

You can measure the heart of a person not only by his attitude but even more so by his gratitude. Today, we're going to examine the need to be thankful. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." The Word of God enlightens us about the most important questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? What will happen to me when I die? What is sin? Can I go to heaven? How should I live? How can I draw close to God? I'm so thankful for my Bible!

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

We're all wholly dependent upon the God who created us for life. He provides all our needs. God's preparation of our universe allows us to breathe, to have fresh water, to have food, and to have night and day; this shows His love for us. Creation is not an accident. God made this world for our blessing, so we need to honor God for all that He's done and to be thankful. The act of giving thanks leads to healthy hearts, minds, and lives. Giving thanks also will lead us to take God and His ways seriously. Nothing is more important!

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 3, verses 12 to 17.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, (and) whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

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

The Christian life should overflow with gratitude. How do we do this? Colossians 3:15-17 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and

admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Let Christ's peace be your focus, sing with thankfulness in your heart, and do everything in His name while giving thanks. These changes will lift your spirits and encourage your heart. Your focus determines your attitude and your destiny. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

It takes discipline to keep focusing your mind on God. Life is ever changing, distracting, and often unfair. We can't predict what misfortunes may lie ahead, but we can count our blessings that we now enjoy with confidence. We can remember that we are victorious in Christ. We can be certain that God will keep His promises, for He Himself has said in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."

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

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

First, when you're thankful, you'll stop complaining and grumbling. Throughout their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled against God. God counted their grumbling as a lack of trust; First Corinthians 10 regards grumbling as sinful as idolatry or sexual immorality. Philippians 2:14-16 says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain." When you complain, you neglect to appreciate what good the Lord has done for you.

Second, when you're thankful, you'll stop being so anxious or worrisome. Philippians 4:4-7 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, (that is, stop worrying about anything) but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." When we rejoice in the Lord and take our burdens and our cares to Him, He blesses us with peace. He'll put a guard around our hearts and minds! Start rejoicing over the things God has done for you, and life will grow more positive and joyful. Proverbs 15:30 says,

“Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones.” Count your blessings, focus on the good, and rejoice in Jesus Christ! Put away the negative and focus on the good. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence (that is, moral excellence) and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” Let your mind make its home there. Think about them all the time.

Third, when you're thankful, you'll become more humble and less prideful. Remember, God is the source of every blessing. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” This is why the Lord asks us to pray to God, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). You may work a job and think it all depends on you, but remember God is at the source of every blessing.

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

Some folks focus on their own abilities and their own righteousness. When a person gives thanks to God merely for what he possesses within himself, he's actually bragging about himself more than thanking God. The Lord Jesus contrasted the arrogant person with the person who recognizes his total need and dependency on God. Look at Luke 18:11-14. “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’” This man wasn't really praying or thanking God; he was reading his resume.

“But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Gratitude to God, knowing that we have an absolute need for God, removes our pride and makes us more humble.

Fourth, when you're thankful, you'll be more gracious to others. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Giving thanks for God's grace leads us to be willing to forgive others. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” A gracious person who knows the kindness of the Lord realizes the importance of being kind to others. He opens his heart and his wallet to help those in need and doesn't complain.

Fifth, when you're thankful, you'll express your love. We're thankful the Lord Jesus willingly and lovingly sacrificed Himself upon the cross. “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John

4:19). Giving thanks helps me keep my focus on the Lord and on what really matters. Gratitude for what Jesus did is at the heart of our conversion. Gratitude leads us to be committed disciples who want to please the Lord in all that we do. We can't look deeply at the cross and then walk away as if nothing matters. Our thankfulness will not let us.

Does the cross matter to you? Surprisingly, some act as if the cross never happened; and others live as if it didn't matter. Perhaps you remember when Jesus healed the ten lepers. "As He entered a village, ten leprosy men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When He saw them, He said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan" (Luke 17:12-16),

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

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

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

I look forward to going to heaven and seeing Jesus. The first thing I want to do is say to Him "Thank you. Thank you for dying for me. Thank you for shedding your blood to cleanse me from all my terrible sins, so that I could live with you." But I don't have to wait till I go to heaven to express my thanks to God. I can do it now by getting right with Him and by worshiping Him. I don't want to miss a single Lord's Day, the first day of the week, without prayer and singing praise to Him. I don't want to miss gathering around the Lord's table to partake of the Lord's Supper, remembering the Lord's body and blood which were given for me.

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

God's goodness leads us to repent and obey the gospel. If I thank God for His grace, I'll gladly follow and obey Him. God's love leads us to trust Him, to repent of our sins, to confess His name, and to be baptized into Christ. According to Romans 6:3-7, we die with Christ in baptism, we're buried with Him in baptism, and we're raised with Him to walk in newness of life in baptism. God wants you; He wants your heart, your life, and your soul. Won't you serve Him and follow Him always. Thankfulness begins when people keep the Lord Jesus in their hearts every day and serve Him. We hope you'll not wait another day to put on your Lord in baptism.

## A Christian

A Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian? Today, we're going to explore who is a Christian and what it means to be one. We don't want to be Christians in name only; we want to serve God with all our hearts and souls. We don't want to be part of a social club or merely belong to a popular worship society. Our Lord calls us to something much higher and nobler. The Lord has called us to be part of His family, to walk in His ways. In Christ, we must die to sin and live for righteousness. In Christ, we care for those who hurt and make every effort to lead everyone to faith and obedience to Christ.

When someone mentions the word "Christian," what do you picture in your mind? Some picture Christians as people who genuinely love the Lord and strive to follow His teaching. Others say, "My parents were Christians, so I'm a Christian." Being a Christian, however, isn't like being an American. We can say, "I was born in America, so I am an American"; but Christianity isn't like that. Many children are born in a Christian environment and learn Christian ways in early childhood; but this by its self doesn't make them Christians. They become Christians when they choose to follow Christ and give their lives to Him.

This is not a childish choice; it's the most critical and important decision that you'll make in your lifetime and it will affect every other choice you make. When a person becomes a Christian, he no longer belongs to himself. He's taking on Christ as his Lord and Master. He's taking up his cross to follow the Lord. If he's serious, he'll never be the same. I hope and pray that you're serious about your faith in Christ Jesus.

Our reading today comes from the book of Acts 26:24-29.

While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

Every Christian is first a disciple. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ. The term "disciple" means a "learner" or "pupil." The disciples of Christ, however, were more than mere students. They devoted themselves to Christ and His teaching. In the last words of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Christ's disciples were to observe all that Jesus taught. They were never to choose to follow some commandments while ignoring others.

Jesus described what He expected His disciples to be and what they were to do in several passages. Jesus gets specific in three passages in the Gospel of John. First, the Lord Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Being a disciple of Christ causes you to love other Christians in the same way Jesus loves them. A disciple is willing to lay down his life for

others just as Jesus did. When Christians love each other, people notice that. They notice that love and are drawn to it. They want some of it.

Second, the Lord Jesus wanted people to focus on and remain in His Word. He said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). A true disciple does not make his own rules or do his own thing. He makes his home in the words of Jesus found in the New Testament. He knows only the truth can set him free. So he abides in the words of Jesus, so that he may know the truth. He's not willing to settle for anything less. He's not willing to go into human traditions. He's not willing to listen to men. He wants to hear what the Lord Jesus has to say. That's what's important.

Third, the Lord Jesus wants us to bear much fruit. The Lord said, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:8-10). Christians, that is, disciples, bear fruit by serving others and by teaching others the gospel. As disciples, they imitate their Master in kindness and love. They make it their business to bring people to Christ and to honor God with their lives.

At first, everyone who followed Jesus was called a disciple. Acts 6:7 says, "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Jewish priests became Christians because they knew that He was indeed the Son of God, and they wanted to obey the Lord. In time, however, the name of Christ began to be attached to the disciples. They were more than merely students; they belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word Christian is more than an adjective; it both describes and identifies those who follow Christ. The word "Christian" adds the suffix "-ian" to the word "Christ." This suffix originally applied to slaves. It came to denote the adherents, or the followers, of an individual or group. A Christian is a slave or adherent of Christ. He is committed to Christ and follows His teaching. The New Testament uses the word "Christian" only three times. The first is in Acts 11:26. "And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." These believers, these disciples "were first called Christians in Antioch" because their behavior and their speech were like Christ. This passage fulfills a promise found in Isaiah 62:2 that, "The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name Which the mouth of the LORD will designate." The word for "called" in Acts 11:26 is not the usual word, but one that has the force of a divine command. This is not a term of derision like some think, but one that God Himself designated.

The second use of "Christian" is found in Acts 26:28. "Agrippa said to Paul, 'In (such) a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?'" Paul was defending himself in Caesarea before Agrippa and Festus and giving him reasons to believe. Paul responded, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:29). Anyone who knows the love of Christ wishes for everyone else to know that love and grace.

Then there is the third use of the word Christian. It's found in 1 Peter 4:15-16. "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." Those who wear the name of Christian must live to honor Christ. It's a worthy name. Their behavior and words should reveal that they gladly belong to Him!

If you're a Christian, you're also a saint. Yes, a saint! The word for "saint" and the word

for “holy” are really the same word in the original Greek. The word “holy” is an adjective, while the word “saint” is a noun. When people are sanctified (that is, made holy) by the blood of Jesus Christ at the time of salvation, God makes them saints. So, every saved person is a saint. Ananias told Paul that he was to go to the Gentiles, “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 (that is, made holy) by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). If you have been sanctified, that is, made holy by the blood of Christ, you are a saint.

Paul greeted the Christians in Corinth, “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those (who are) sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul said to the whole church at Ephesus that was made up of Jews and Gentiles, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household (His family), having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22). The New Testament knows nothing of some special class of “saints.” This concept was developed many centuries later. If you’re a Christian, you want to hold to Jesus and what comes in the Bible, not to those other things.

If you’re a Christian, not only are you a saint but you’re a child of God. Yes, a child of God! John 1:11-13 says, “He (Jesus) came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Only God can make a child of God. Only God can make a saint, a Christian or a disciple. Children of God are born again by the will of God. Galatians 3:26-27 tells us how: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ (that is, immersed in water into to Christ) have put on Christ.” When people believe and put on Christ in baptism, that’s when they become children of God, saints, disciple and Christians.

If we’re God’s children, let’s act like our Father in heaven. Philippians 2:14-15 says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

A child of God must act differently than the world acts. The Lord Jesus said, “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends (His) rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:44-48).

If you’re a Christian, a disciple, a saint, you’re a brother or sister in Christ. Hebrews 2:11 says, “For both He (Jesus) who sanctifies and those who are sanctified (made holy) are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” All of the Christians are brethren. When Paul and Peter wrote their letters, they frequently addressed people in the church as “brothers and sometimes as sisters.” And Peter wrote, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another

from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:22-23). You have to obey the gospel to be a child of God. As children of God, we must love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

God wants us to be united as brothers and sisters. We unite on His Word. Paul wrote, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you" (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). Instead of holding fast to one another in Christ and His Word, they were splitting into groups. Paul explained, "Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). No, we belong to Christ.

As brothers and sisters we must remain united behind the Lord Jesus and not be split into groups and denominations. The Lord Jesus prayed, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). The current division among people who call themselves Christians is a stumbling block to those in the world.

Brothers care about each other and stay united. Galatians 6:1-2 says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

Are you a true Christian, a disciple, a saint, a child of God, and a brother or sister in Christ? Have you denied yourself and taken up your cross?

In God's eyes, our highest calling is to wear and honor the name of Jesus Christ. We must never become a fair-weather Christian, a pretend Christian, or a Christian in name only. Christians should truly honor the name of Christ in every aspect of their lives. A true Christian has denied himself, taken up his cross daily, and given his life to follow the Lord. Sadly, many who wear the name of Christ fail to understand that they truly belong to the Lord Jesus. When you confess Christ and you're baptized into Christ, take your commitment seriously!

Peter describes a Christian, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; (and) you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10). One who takes God seriously realizes what God has done for him to save him and to give him an inheritance in heaven. He realizes how much better God's marvelous light is than the darkness of the world. He knows he belongs to God!

Who do you belong to? Do you belong to Christ? To become a Christian and to belong to Him, you must believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God. You must repent of your sins and turn to the teaching of Christ. Upon confessing your faith, you must be baptized into Christ, born again into the family of God. When you're baptized, immersed into Christ in water, God will wash away your sins; He'll make you holy, and add you to His family as His child. Acts 22:16 says, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Oh, how I wish you would become a Christian today!