

Program Transcripts

For September 2013



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

September 2013

Topics subject to change without notice

SEPTEMBER 1 – A BETTER PERSON

We need to become the salt and the light God intended us to be. We can make our world a better place by making ourselves better people who love the Lord and live according to His teaching.

SEPTEMBER 8 – NOT BIBLICAL ANYMORE

Many people feel spiritually empty because their church has changed and seems to have forgotten God. If you feel abandoned by the religious group you attend, we are offering the Biblical alternative.

SEPTEMBER 15 – SIN

Though some don't think so, sin is a real, spiritual problem. What are you doing about your sin? In this program we're going to take a long look at sin and its consequences, realizing we must do something about our sin.

SEPTEMBER 22 – WHEN WE FAIL

A lady called and said, "I've just made the worst mistake in my life! Is there any hope for me?" We all sin and need the forgiveness of God and His blessing. What is forgiveness and what will it do in our lives? We'll learn what it means to be forgiven.

SEPTEMBER 29 – WHAT GRACE TEACHES

We rejoice greatly in the grace of God, but most folks do not know that grace is not only a gift but also a teacher. When people take seriously all that God has done for them, they will learn a new and wonderful way of life.

A Better Person

Today Search celebrates its 34th year of ministry on television. We're grateful for all our viewers. Today we are going to examine how to become a better person. God's Word is filled with truth and righteousness, and following the Lord is the best way.

For 33 years In Search of the Lord's Way has broadcasted the gospel of Jesus Christ. Mack Lyon began this ministry in 1980 from Wewoka, Oklahoma, broadcasting on KTEN in Ada, Oklahoma. Brother Lyon has been a preacher to millions of people through the years, and I thought of him as my preacher, too. As time passed, the Search program expanded to dozens of broadcast stations and eventually went to the Inspiration Network, becoming truly nationwide and going out to every single state. Today in addition to the Inspiration Network, Search broadcasts on 200 television stations including the CW Plus network, 150 cable systems, and 50 radio stations within the United States.

Through the years, Search has had the opportunity to reach outside the United States to numerous countries. The Lord opened a wonderful door for us in June to go on Inspiration Network International, a network that appears on six satellites to more than 100 million households in 158 countries. We welcome our new viewers in these countries and we pray you will be blessed. We're deeply grateful to the churches and the individual Christians who make this program available and to our volunteers at Edmond who help us in our ministry. We come to you by the grace of God and with the support of many who love the truth and love your souls. Today we are going to look at what it takes to make a better person.

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in the Gospel According to Matthew 5:13-16. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven."

Many people fall into the habit of complaining and criticizing. They seem to concentrate on what is ugly and ignore what's beautiful, focusing on what is wrong and neglecting to see what's right. It's easy to become negative about everything – your life, your family, your community, and your nation. We realize that worldly evil surrounds us. And it discourages us to see the constant battle militant unbelievers are waging against faith in Christ Jesus and the pressure to remove God from everything in our society. Bible history, however, reminds us that God is in control of everything. In the end, the Lord Jesus will lead us in victory.

We can mourn the fact that our world is growing spiritually worse day by day and just give up; or...we can resolve to make our little corners of the world a better place. We can't control much of what happens in our government, but we can make the most of our own lives. We can accept responsibility for who we are, what we believe, and how we live. We can become the salt and the light that God intended us to be. We can make our world a better place by making ourselves better people who love the Lord and live according to His teaching.

First, we would all do well to count our blessings. Learning to be truly thankful for all things will brighten your life and make you a better person. First Thessalonians 5:18 urges us to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." In all

circumstances, good or bad? Yes, in all circumstances! We can easily rejoice at victories and blessings; but it takes maturity to rejoice over the troubles and struggles. The apostles rejoiced in Acts 5:41 “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” of Christ Jesus. James 1:2-4 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” God is using that trial that you face today to make a better person out of you, so be thankful for it. If you can see your trial as something good, you can rejoice even when life is difficult.

David went through many life-threatening experiences, but he said, “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1) Count your blessings, and you will see you have much for which to be thankful. First John 3:1 says, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called the children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” God has marvelously blessed us in making us His children. The world won’t ever understand us or even share our morals and values. But if we have to make a choice between following the world or following the Lord, we choose the Lord. What we have in Christ is better than anything that this world offers.

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, if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” We have to acknowledge the evil, yes; and the negative in our world from time to time; but we don’t have to live there. So let’s not focus our hearts there.

Second, we must read the Word of God and take its teaching seriously. If you wish to feed and nourish your soul, you cannot find anything better than the Word of God. How long has it been since you read through a book of the Bible? Have you ever read the Bible all the way through? While 88 percent of people own a Bible and 80 percent say that it’s sacred, 61 percent wish they read their Bibles more. The Bible has the answers to the most important questions of life. It reveals who we are, where we came from, why we are here, and what will happen to us after death.

We can measure the success of any nation or culture by how it treats God and the Bible. Those nations that forsake God and His Word may appear to prosper for a while, but as time passes, they crumble from the inside. Because they turn their backs on God and His values, they have no moral foundation. When people are unafraid to lie, have no respect for authority, become selfish, and put their lusts before their families, their society falls into great misery. When people listen to God and put His commandments into practice, they find life filled with good things and with peace.

James contrasts human wisdom with God’s wisdom. “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere” (James 3:16-17). When people do their own thing and live according to their own rules, it brings nothing but evil. But when people live according to the wisdom of God, they find peace. They are gentle to each other; and you can reason with them. They’re willing to help those who need help; they bless everyone around them. They treat everyone the same and aren’t hypocrites. God’s way lifts people up instead of tearing them down.

Third, we must pray God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If everyone followed God's will on earth, it would be a lot like heaven. Crime and war would cease; all people would be treated like family and with respect. People would live honorably and speak the truth with one another. Instead of being filled with anger, they would ask for forgiveness and they would grant forgiveness. They would settle their differences with prayer, remembering the cross. They would help the weak, feed the hungry, and focus on the love of Christ on the cross. They would see sin as it truly is, destructive; and thank God for showing us a better way in Christ.

If you don't like the people in your government, have you prayed for them? First Timothy 2:1-2 says, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." Whether we like people in government or not, we should pray for them, so that we could live peaceful and quiet lives and be godly and dignified in every way. Throughout history there have been leaders who oppose the way of the Lord, but we should still pray for them. In fact, 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 He sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:44-45). We should do the right thing, even if we're mistreated and slandered for it. We should do what is good to others, even when they don't deserve it. Why? Because we are sons of our Father; and that's who we are.

Fourth, we must change our hearts and change our lives; that is, we must repent. We must turn from evil and live out our faith. It does little good to pray for change if we are not willing to change ourselves. God asks us to repent, knowing that we have the ability to change. We can change; and, in fact, God commands us to change. The apostle Paul told an assembly of pagans who didn't even know God, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of life.

Some say people cannot change; but the Bible everywhere assumes people can repent and should repent. Why would God command people to do something that's impossible? Some think people are born so corrupt that they can't ever change, but the Bible shows how people do change. Romans 6:17-18 says, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Here are some slaves of sin who obeyed God's will from their heart, and were freed from their sin, and then became slaves of righteousness. Jonah chapter three tells how the people of Nineveh believed in God and repented of their wickedness and violence. Zacchaeus was a sinner, but he made things right and became very generous to the poor. The prodigal son came to his senses and he came home, leaving his sinful life behind.

Yes, we can repent. If we want God to bless our nation, shouldn't we repent? Shouldn't we turn from our wicked ways and seek God's forgiveness? Reading God's Word and praying are necessary; but we must also repent of our sins. We can't expect God to bless us while we continue in sin. We can't treat life as trivial or God's plan for marriage as optional and expect

God to bless us. Just because something becomes legal doesn't mean that God approves of it. Changes in human law doesn't change God's law.

We can be legal in the eyes of the government but still sinful in the eyes of God. Human law will let you get drunk at home, but God condemns drunkenness in Galatians 5:19-21. Human law will let you take the life of the unborn, but God condemns the shedding of innocent blood in Proverbs 6:16-19. Human law may permit sexual behavior between consenting adults, but God still condemns fornication in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Just because you can escape the courts of men doesn't mean that you'll also escape the judgment seat of Christ. Revelation 20:11-15 says that He will judge us according to our deeds by what is written in the books; and that is, the Bible. Have you repented?

Fifth, we must share our faith in Christ. The gospel is good news that will bless everyone who hears it. If the gospel is good for you, it's good for your family and friends. How can anyone listen to the message of salvation and then keep it to himself? An angel told Cornelius to send for "Peter, who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14-15). When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, he found that Cornelius had called together his family and friends to hear him speak. Acts 10:27 says there were "many people assembled." Cornelius couldn't keep the good news to himself; he wanted all of his loved ones to know. I hope you're encouraging your family and friends to know the Lord and to keep His will.

We're speaking so frankly, because we love you and want you to know God and to be saved. We confront sin because we know how it destroys people. We want every person to be right with God. If you choose to do what is right, you'll encourage others to do what is right. If you make it your goal to grow close to God, you'll encourage others to do the same. A better world begins with each of us making important changes in our hearts and our lives to draw close to God.

An old hymn says, "Brighten the corner where you are! Someone far from harbor you may guide across the bar! Brighten the corner where you are!" We must not wait till someone else comes along to make changes in our lives. Let's begin today to brighten our corner of the world. We can make a difference in ourselves, and that will encourage others to change. The Lord Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16) Is your light burning? Do people see good in you and praise God for your faith and love? Be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; make a difference!

Being a better person begins with becoming a Christian; nothing is more important than putting Christ in your life. Becoming a Christian starts with faith in Christ and love for Christ. When you believe and love Him, you will put your trust in Him; and you will remove sinful ways and replace them with righteous ways; you'll confess Him to everyone; and you will be baptized in His name for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you're baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins. Romans 6:3-4 says, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." We're baptized into Christ through faith in the working of God. Just as God raised Jesus, He raises us up to walk in newness of life. Be baptized today!

Not Biblical Anymore

Exodus 1:6-10

Where is the Bible and our convictions these days? Many people feel abandoned by their spiritual leaders. Many people today feel spiritually empty because their denomination or church has forgotten God. Do you feel empty? The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). If Jesus is the way to the Father, we need to know what the Lord Jesus teaches. If we love the Lord, we need to be obedient to what He says. If He has given us His way in the Scriptures, then we need to know what they teach and hold firmly to them. We want the Lord's way because we know that nothing else can take its place.

Many people today feel a little like Rip Van Winkle. You remember Washington Irving's story about the fun loving man, who was a hen-pecked husband, and who hated profitable labor, and how he was continuously nagged by his wife. So he escapes to the mountains; and while there Rip drank some liquor that caused him to sleep for twenty years. When he awoke, he finds that the American Revolution has taken place and everything seems different.

You've probably noticed that our culture has changed in recent years. Both morality and religion seem to have turned upside down. What used to be sinful is now legal, so society is telling preachers not to speak out against immorality. Society says we can't call certain immoral behaviors sinful any more. Some say that marriage is obsolete. Society says husbands and fathers are no longer the heads of their homes. Some are pushing women to take leadership roles in the church. Many who stand with God's Word are amazed and they ask, "What has happened that people no longer hold to the Bible?"

Our reading today comes from Exodus 1:6-10. "Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.'"

I once had dinner with an acquaintance who belonged to a prominent denomination, and the conversation turned to religion. This man told me how much his church had changed and how alienated he felt. He grimaced at the moral and spiritual compromises that the leadership of his denomination had embraced. He felt like he was no longer in the same denomination. What he knew growing up and what he saw in the present were very different. He felt that his denomination had abandoned what it had believed and had become something unbiblical.

Society and secular progressives have pushed many religious groups to accept views that dismiss the Bible. They told the religious world that they were childish and backward believers and must accept what a more advanced society thinks or they will die. They said evolution is proven, and the church must give up its belief in creation. They said the unborn are not viable people until they are born and may be aborted. They glorified non-traditional families and said marriage was obsolete. They said the Bible wasn't for us today but spoke to people in other ages. They decided that love for people was more important than loving and obeying God. They argued that the grace of God meant that we didn't have to keep any rules at all. In the end they denied that God has any authority over their lives or that He matters to them.

Sadly, the more any culture pushes God out of their thinking, and their ethics, or their morals, the more miserable and difficult their lives will become. Societies can't thumb their noses at God and expect the Lord to favor them and bless them. Just because the thinking of a people changes with time doesn't mean that God has changed His mind. Psalm 33:11 says, "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, and the plans of his heart to all generations." People's attitudes may change, but God's views on the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage haven't changed. Just because people permit themselves to violate God's law doesn't mean that God will permit it. We can't vote on God's will. God is God, and we are not. Wherever you live, whoever you are, God's Word is still binding on you.

The prophet Jeremiah revealed the will of God in Jeremiah 18:7-10; God said, "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, then turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it." God is far more in charge of the affairs of every nation than we might think. God plants nations, and God plucks nations. He deals with nations on the basis of whether they are willing to listen to His voice. Are you listening to God?

I fear some think that because everyone believes or practices something, that it must be approved by God. God, however, doesn't take a poll to determine what is right and wrong. 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 popular, easy way is not safe but leads to destruction. Only a few people will follow God's narrow way, but it leads to life! Even if everybody tells lies, lying is still wrong. Even if everybody steals, stealing remains sinful. No matter how popular a sin is, sin will never be okay with God. You can't solve the problem of sin by making it popular.

The same is true with regard to religious groups. When people hear the Lord's voice and follow His teaching, He blesses them and counts them as His own. But when an individual or some group ignores His teaching or departs from the way of the Lord into moral or doctrinal error, God holds them all accountable. Sometimes people create religious groups and cults according to their own thinking rather than listening to God. Even if that group grows very large, it's still accountable to God. The Lord created every person and will someday judge each one according to the words that are found in the books. He commands all men everywhere to repent. We're all accountable to the Lord whether we know it, whether we acknowledge it, or whether we agree to it.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account." Time and distance don't erase accountability. A change in the winds of cultural worldviews doesn't release anyone from God's jurisdiction. We're accountable to the Lord in matters large and small. Rebellion over a small matter is still rebellion against God.

I must tell you, more than accountability love is our motivation to follow the way of the Lord. When people love the Lord they enjoy being like Him. The Lord's way lifts up virtue and makes every person better and nobler. Aren't you tired of all the ungodliness, dishonesty, and

indifference in our world today? Aren't you weary of the selfishness, greed, pride, and power-hungry attitudes? Aren't you hungry for what's pure and good? Don't you wish people were kind and trustworthy? We love the Lord, because we have seen what the love of the Lord does in the hearts and lives of the people who turn from sin to righteousness. They become new people filled with faith, and hope, and love. Men become faithful and loving husbands and fathers when Christ is in their life. Wives become warm and loyal wives and mothers when Christ is in their life. Children look to parents with grateful hearts when Christ is in their life. Neighbors respect each other and bear one another's burdens whenever Christ is in their life. Second Corinthians 5:17 rightly says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; and the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Those new things are so much better than the old ways.

Take God and His Word out of people's lives, and people will be empty and in misery. They'll turn to destructive behaviors that enslave them. They will become indifferent to other people; they will be selfish, and ungrateful. They'll seek in vain to find something to take God's place, but nothing will. The Lord's way is so much better than the ways of the world; and we have to wonder how anyone could prefer sin to righteousness, or prefer lies to the truth, or prefer selfishness to love.

When churches substitute story-telling, and pop-psychology, and humor for a study of the Word of God, they've moved from following the instructions of Scripture to being a social club. Paul charged the young preacher Timothy, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound (or healthy) teaching; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you (Timothy), you be sober in all things, you endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2-5). God expects preachers to preach the Bible, not their opinions, not their experiences, and not their imaginations.

If you attend a worship service that doesn't study the Bible, you're being cheated out of God's message. Has your religious group deserted the truth of Scripture so they can entertain you or make you feel good? One popular speaker has decided that he will not speak out against sin or speak about salvation; he said he would leave that to others. He may be a famous motivator, but he's no preacher of the gospel. He has made his own religion that has references to some of the Bible, but he has cheated his listeners out of the whole counsel of God.

Some religious groups study religious books written by men but never open the Scriptures. They may not realize that the human author may be contradicting Scripture or teaching something false. People who stop studying Scripture often fill their minds with half-truths and mistaken ideas. The Lord Jesus said, "It is written, that Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We need all of God's Word to live as God wills. Second Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called us to his own glory and excellence." In the Bible we find the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. When we stop hearing the Bible, we can't be sure that what we're hearing is true. Just because someone calls himself a preacher doesn't mean what he says is true.

This is why the Lord Jesus charged the apostles, "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). We must know the truth so we can distinguish what God really says from what people think. Acts 17:11 calls the Bereans noble, because “they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” We too must begin examining the Scriptures so that we won’t be fooled by something that is unbiblical. Colossians 2:8 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, and according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Study your Bible; don’t let anyone lead you astray from the truth of God’s Word.

Perhaps you attend where they substitute entertainment for worship; you may be cheating yourself out of true Biblical worship in spirit and in truth. Many religious groups have given themselves over to religious entertainment, where worship leaders and soloists perform religious music like at a concert. God wants everyone to worship Him, not watch someone else perform for them. The Lord Jesus said, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). When people take the focus off of God and put it on themselves as in a concert, they aren’t worshipping God; they’re performing. Jesus said, “But the hour is coming, and now is here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Don’t substitute praising someone’s talent for the worship of God.

Why have I said this? Because I’ve met people who say their denominations and congregations have moved away from the morals and the teaching of the Bible; and they feel empty and abandoned. Some still hold firmly to the truth of God’s Word and still examine the Scriptures daily to see what is true. Please consider studying with one of the churches of Christ in your area.

For some time you may have sensed what we’ve discussed today. Perhaps you’re attending a religious service or you belong to a religious group that doesn’t hold to Bible authority anymore. You’re hearing preaching that isn’t preaching from the Word of God and isn’t leading you closer to God. You are being entertained rather than called to worship. You need the Lord. God said through Isaiah, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). What our sick world needs is not more looking from side to side at what people think or feel; we need to look up to God for His wisdom. What God teaches is far better than the ways of the world. Don’t substitute human ways for what is genuinely from God, and then by doing that rob yourself.

Isaiah 55:7 says, “Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” God yearns for every heart to come to Him, for people to leave their own ways and follow His teaching. When people turn their hearts, God abundantly pardons their past and blesses their future. Don’t cheat yourself out of a genuine faith.

To get right with God, place your faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Believing in Him as Lord means believing His teaching is true and necessary to be obeyed. Real faith and real love leads to repentance. Repentance means I will forsake every wrong and turn to what is right and be Biblical. Repent and be baptized into Christ upon the confession of your faith. When you are baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins according to Acts 22:16; and He will add you to His church according to Acts 2:47.

Sin

James 1:12-15

Are you aware that sin is a real, spiritual problem? What are you doing about your sin? We love God and we love you; and that's why we spend time in God's Word. We know that the Lord's way will bless your life and will help you grow spiritually. We know the Lord's way will help you avoid the pitfalls of life. We want the best for you.

The word sin in the Old Testament first meant "to miss the mark" and later by extension to the idea of sin. You get the original meaning in Judges 20:16, "Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss." The words "not miss" later came to apply to the teaching of God. The mark that people miss today is when they fail to do the revealed will of God. They either fail to do what God says should be done or they do what God says should never be done. In either case, they miss God's mark and they commit sin.

Scripture uses a variety of terms to describe sin: "evil," "abomination," "iniquity," "transgression," "lawlessness," "ungodliness," "error," or "wicked." Each of these sets aside the ways of God so that one can do as he pleases. Sin is like a snare that has an attractive power but ends up destroying the person who falls for it. In Genesis 4:7 God warned Cain not to let his past failure overcome him. He said, "If you do well, will not your countenance (that is, your face) be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain, however, fell to temptation and killed his brother, Abel.

Our reading today comes from the letter of James 1:12-15. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." Let's pray together. Father, we are thankful that You have taught us what You would have us to do and how You would like us to live in Your Word. Help us to be faithful and loving to You and help us to stay away from sin. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

Today we're going to explore the Biblical concept of "sin." While everyone has an inner notion of what sin is, we are focusing on how God sees sin and how the Bible defines sin. We realize that about one in eight people say that there's no such thing as sin and about one in three think that sin is an obsolete word. But we feel it necessary to ask God what He thinks rather than listen to the fickle whims of society.

What is sin? First John 3:4 says, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." Another version said that, "sin is the transgression of the law." Sin ignores or violates the law of God, and in doing so it shows utter disrespect for God Himself. It says to God that He is so insignificant that his laws and commandments do not matter. When we do what God says not to do, we really challenge His authority in our lives. He created us; He gave us life; and He provides for our needs. When we sin against Him, we show that we are ungrateful for what He has done for us. Sometimes we sin by failing to do what God requires of us. James 4:17 says, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." When we fail to keep the commandments of the Lord our God, we're saying God is not

important in our lives. By failing to do what is right, we are actually showing contempt for God. First John 5:17 simply says, "All unrighteousness is sin." When we fail to do what is right or do what God says is wrong, we are not acting righteously; we are sinning.

Someone asks, "Is sin really that big a problem?" People commonly tend to downplay their sin. We try to soften our sin by labeling it as a mistake, an inappropriate act, or a misjudgment. Some who cannot use the word "evil" will use the word "sick" to describe wickedness. When you are the person hurt by someone else's sin against you, you don't see sin the way that he does. He may feel indifferent or he may be genuinely sorry, but you're the one hurt by his sin. You understand the pain of sin. Every sin is an offense to God; sin violates God's commandments and breaks God's heart. God takes our sin personally.

When Potiphar's wife tried to get the servant Joseph to commit adultery with her, Joseph said, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). The Lord was with Joseph, and Joseph knew that he had no right to have her. Joseph's concern was with violating God's commands; he simply would not offend God! I hear people say that we ought to be able to love anyone that we want, but love doesn't justify a wicked relationship or sinning against God. Love doesn't make right out of wrong. We must not confuse love with sexual desire. God has put boundaries on whom we can have sexual relations with, whether we love them or not. Love does not make adultery or incest okay. Loving children doesn't make it right to marry a young child. When we cross God's boundaries, we cross God.

All sin is evil; it's harmful; and unjust. It offends God, destroys the one who commits it, and it hurts other people. The Lord Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, and deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). We must be careful not to let our hearts deceive us by thinking that whatever our hearts desire is okay. Our hearts can lead us into sin, if we're not careful.

The Bible tells us about fleshly desires in Galatians 5:19-21. Paul said, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." He said, "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." You can't please the flesh by committing these sins and expect to live with God in the kingdom of heaven.

Someone says, "Surely, God won't punish me." Are you sure? The Bible says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until judgment; and if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:4-9). God has a track record of punishing those who sin; and we must take this warning seriously.

People, on one hand, deny the reality of sin because they're secular and have pushed God out of their lives. On the other hand, they have a moral conscience that reminds them that certain things are wrong. A research professor in sociology at Trinity University in Connecticut said, "Secular people still believe there's sin, judgment and punishment. It's just a different list of sinners than religious traditions teach. What is unacceptable has changed. Racism and sexual harassment, which were not sins in the past, are now. Adultery and addiction are just bad and sad behavior. And commercial sex is a no, but breaking the bonds of marriage is not." He said there are no universal rules. "If people are held guilty, the punishment will be in this world, not the next. Secular people (according to him) don't burn in hell; they burn in the court of public opinion."

But God doesn't play by secular rules; He's not subject to our secular culture. He created this world; He keeps this world running; and will one day judge this world by His rules. God is not a servant who must come running to us for acceptance. He stands above us, and we need to respect and obey Him. God isn't our servant; we're God's subjects. We are not His judge; He will judge us. We can't make rules for God; we must live by His rules.

When we sin, we can't expect that it won't affect us. Sin leaves its mark on our lives. First, we must realize that sin will deceive us. Hebrews 3:12-13 says, "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 is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Sin will promise you pleasure, but will end up hurting you and hardening your heart.

The deception of sin leads to a second thing. Sin enslaves. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you that, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). Again, Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" When a person gives himself to pleasure, desires begin to take over and will cause people to do things that they would never have thought they would do.

Third, sin will harden your heart. When people ignore God, according to Ephesians 4:19, they "become callous" and they give "themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." When people give themselves to sin, they end up having no limits. They don't care what they do or how they hurt others. Our culture has changed so much, permitting sin and encouraging sin, that we have become desensitized to sin. People use the foulest of language; television glamorizes the worst of behaviors; and we lose respect for life and home.

Fourth, sin will bring spiritual death. James 1:15 says, "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." Spiritual death means we no longer have the promise of God. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Sin and spiritual death are serious! The wrath of God is not something to ignore. Are you in sin?

Fifth, sin will separate us from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He

does not hear.” When we fall out of favor with God, He ceases to hear our prayers or to give us His blessing. We can lose our friends on earth and still go to heaven, but we can't lose our friendship with God and have a home in heaven. We can afford to lose everything that we have except our soul. What are you doing about your sins?

People tend to deceive themselves about sin! Many see the sins of others but they don't consider their own sins. No one likes to recognize himself as a sinner or suppose that he could be lost. Many people think they can live just any way they wish and not face the consequences.

Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” We can't mock God by living a sinful life and expect God to bless you and ignore your sin.

First John 1:6-10 says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness and sin, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” The consequences of sin are heartbreaking, but thanks be to God that we have forgiveness through the blood of Jesus His Son and can be cleansed of all our sins.

We've talked about sin today because it's important. Your soul is at stake. Because God loves you; and because we love you, we must speak about sin's challenge to your soul. Thankfully, God has the answer to sin in Christ, and we have hope! Put your hope in Christ! Let's pray together. Father, we are thankful that through the blood of Jesus, our Lord, that we can have the forgiveness of our sins. Help us, Heavenly Father, to commit ourselves to You and to love You and to walk in all of Your ways. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

What are you going to do with your sin? Will you get angry that somebody pointed out that you've sinned? Or, will you ignore your old sins and just kind of hope they will be forgotten? Will you deny that you've done anything wrong? The best thing, the only thing, you can do about your sins is to repent of them and to respond to the grace of Christ. God's grace is powerful and wonderful, but it works with your repentance, not in spite of it. Again, I ask you, “What are you going to do with your sin?” I hope you'll think seriously about this.

God's forgiveness is real because of the price that Jesus paid for us. Isaiah 53:5-6 says, “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.” He personally bore our sins in His body on the cross.

If the story of His amazing love touches your heart, respond by showing your love for Him. Put your trust in Him by believing that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and be willing to confess your faith publicly. Because you love God, turn away from the sin that offends and grieves Him. Repentance is not merely a turning away; it's also a turning to God to serve and obey Him. Because you believe and love God, be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. God's grace is abundant; He can forgive all your sins. Acts 22:16 says, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” Don't delay! Become a Christian today!

When We Fail

A lady called and said, “Phil, I’ve made the worst mistake of my life. What am I to do? Is there any hope for someone like me?” I told her there is always hope. The Bible teaches us the things that we most need to know. It speaks to us with wisdom and gives us the help we need when we need it. Though the truth is not always easy to hear, it’s always what’s best for us. It reminds us of the love of God and of the desire that God has to save us and bless us. Even when we’ve made the biggest mistakes, God’s Word gives us hope.

Sometimes people think they have so messed up their lives with sin that there’s no hope for them at all. Some even think they’re beyond God’s ability to forgive. God, however, reveals His perfect patience with us in the blood of Jesus. He knows all about us. In spite of our sins, the Lord still loves us and wants us to be saved. God can help you find forgiveness.

The apostle Paul 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. 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). If Paul is the foremost sinner, you aren’t. If God could save him as foremost, then God can always save and forgive you. There is hope! You can come to God.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 103:8-12. “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Let’s pray together. Father, we are so grateful that You have loved us and have been compassionate and kind to us. Help us to devote ourselves to You always. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

The New Testament tells of a man whose faith failed for a time. While circumstances may differ, the experience of trying but failing is common to all of us. Matthew 14:22-32 says, “Immediately He (Jesus) made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ And He said, ‘Come!’ And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’”

As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he did well; but when Peter became frightened by the wind, he began to sink. His faith in the Lord kept him afloat. How often people take their eyes off of Jesus and put them on their circumstances. They forget who Jesus is and how

powerful He is. When Peter sank, he cried out for Jesus to save him. We all need saving from sin. Peter showed doubt, but the Lord graciously helped him anyway. He will also help you even in those times when your faith seems small. Call to Him. He'll reach out his hand and help you back to safety. When you see the power of God, you too will say, "You are certainly God's Son!"

In Matthew 16:21-23 Jesus "warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'"

Oddly, Peter first confessed Christ, but he missed the point about His suffering. Jesus blessed Peter for confessing Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God; but Peter missed the word "must" in Jesus' prophecy about his upcoming suffering and crucifixion. Peter didn't rebuke Jesus out of spite. Peter loved the Lord and didn't want Him to suffer and die. But the suffering and crucifixion "must" take place for Jesus to fulfill the will of God. Jesus rebuked Peter for thinking about himself and his own desire to be with Jesus on earth. He didn't fully realize that God's plan for Jesus was to die upon the cross. Peter would eventually witness all of it. When Peter stood in Jesus' way at this point, Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan!" I don't know of any other time that Jesus calls someone "Satan." But Peter had become a stumbling block to the will of God and was acting like Satan. It's always a failure when someone opposes the will of God, but even with such a sin, Jesus did not completely forsake Peter.

In Matthew 17:1-5 the Bible says, "Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" God chose this mountain top to reveal the glory of Jesus, a greater glory than that of Moses or Elijah who are servants of God. Jesus, however, is the Son of God. We are to listen to Jesus, to obey Him always.

Many people listen to the wrong sources. Moses was God's lawgiver; and Elijah was God's prophet. Each of them had a ministry to Israel in their day. God used them to do great things. Up until Peter met Jesus, Peter would have regarded Moses and Elijah as his great heroes. That's why he wanted to show them respect. But God now speaks to us through His Son Jesus. Jesus isn't just another lawgiver or prophet. Jesus is God's Son, and God wants us to listen to Him. If you put your preacher up on a pedestal, you've made the same mistake that Peter made. If you put a human denomination before Jesus, you've made a great mistake. Jesus is our only authority! God corrected Peter, expecting Peter to change and to become different. When we're mistaken, we too should correct our thinking. Today, people need to turn from man-made religion and start listening to Jesus. Even people with the best intentions can be wrong; and they need to listen to the Lord.

Matthew 26:31-35 reveals another sin of Peter. It says, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.’ But Peter said to Him, ‘Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.’ And all the disciples said the same thing too.”

Matthew 26:69-75 tells the story, “Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, ‘You too were with Jesus the Galilean.’ But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are talking about.’ When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ And again he denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’ A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.’ Then he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know the man!’ And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, ‘Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Although Peter boasted that he would give his life for Jesus, he still denied being a disciple of the Lord three times. Peter allowed his fear to overcome his love. Jesus was present when Peter denied him the third time. Luke 22:61 says that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And then Peter went out and wept bitterly. Have you ever committed such a sin, that you wept bitterly for it? Sin brings such guilt and regret; it makes a man hate what he’s done and even hate himself. Sin is the single greatest destroyer of self-esteem.

As for Peter, the Lord can see beyond the present. Luke reveals the heart of Jesus toward Peter. Jesus said, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-34). Jesus also knows when you and I fail. Have you ever thought that the Lord may be praying for us, for you and for me? Jesus knew Peter would come back after his failure. He said, “Once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” God knows our weaknesses; but because He loves us, He is willing to forgive and give us the opportunity to change. Let me suggest some things that you can do if you fail.

First, admit and confess your failure. Don't try to blame others or ignore your failure. Sin won't vanish away on its own. God remembers. Being honest with yourself and with God is the first step to overcoming any weakness. John said, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). The blood of Jesus can cleanse Christians from every sin. Let me suggest that you talk to trusted friends, Christian friends, to gain their help and wisdom. James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” God can heal our bodies, our souls, and our lives. Pray that God will help you to use your failures as a training ground for your spiritual growth.

And so second we say, learn from your failures. Learn what you did wrong and then grow from it. Peter denied Christ three times before the cock crowed. His failure is recorded in all four of the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The best-selling book of all time tells

about his failure. Maybe there are times when you feel like Peter did – that you've failed and you are worthless. But don't lose hope. Failure doesn't have to be the end for the believer. Don't give up. Take your failure seriously, but not hopelessly. Consider what you did wrong; realize that sin offends God; and then determine never to repeat that behavior again. Commit yourself to follow in the Lord's steps and not let sin overcome you. God is ready to forgive the penitent and the contrite person. Psalm 34:18 says, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." God loves people, even when they sin; and He wants to help us overcome that sin. When we humbly and penitently turn to Him with contrite hearts, He opens His heart towards us.

Third, turn to God for help. God loves you. He is patient with us in our weaknesses. We all need the strength of God in our lives. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The Scripture promises, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We need to believe God will be with us to help us with the strength that we need or He is going to make a way of escape. The one thing that we must never, never forget, even if we have failed in the past, God is still on our side and loves us. Let's pray together. Father in Heaven, we are so grateful that Your grace is greater than our sins; that You are patient with us; and that You love us and can forgive us. Father, help us to be humble and penitent as we approach You. In Jesus' name, Amen!

The Lord is ready to forgive, if He knows you sorrow for your sins and are willing to repent. If Jesus could forgive Peter for denying him three times, He can forgive you. David said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17) A contrite heart and godly sorrow will lead a person to repent. One is not fully obedient to the Lord merely by being sorry or even by wishing he hadn't sinned. He must also change his ways. Peter turned again; David turned again; and so must we.

When Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost, his words pierced the hearts of those who were listening. They felt deep guilt and wanted to know what to do to find forgiveness. Peter said, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, (even) as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself" (Acts 2:38-39). That's the same message that we bring to you; if you're not a Christian, we want you to become one today. That's the message for all people in all places for all time. It's a message of hope and deliverance, of joy and salvation. You can go to heaven and live forever with the Lord if you will come to Him. No matter what you've said or done. No matter how much pain you've brought to yourself or others, there is hope for you when you believe, repent, confess, and are baptized. Your sins will all be washed away, and you'll become a child of God and be added to the Lord's church. Won't you obey today?

Grace

Every blessing we possess comes to us by the grace of God. God not only forgives us, He also teaches us how to live. Today we're going to look at the lessons that God's grace teaches us. We follow the Lord because we know that the Lord is good and every law He gives us is for our good. God's ways bless us with wisdom and with hope. God is not only good to us; He is also good for us. So we search the Scriptures to find that strait and narrow path that leads to the abundant life and to eternal life.

We rejoice greatly in the grace of God. We realize that without God's grace we would have no hope in this life or in the life to come. God didn't give us His grace merely to save us; He was also interested in transforming our lives so that we might become like Him. Grace is not merely a gift; it's also a teacher. A teacher? Yes, a teacher! It trains and equips us for a whole new life in Christ, much different from the ways of the world.

Someone defined "grace" as God's Redemption at Christ's Expense. Certainly, we need the grace of God to touch our souls and to shape our lives. Paul explains, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:11-14).

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to Titus 3:3-7. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful that even though we had sin in our lives that You have seen fit to send Jesus to save us. Father, help us to respond to Your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen!

There is nothing sadder than a person who has been blessed greatly but learns nothing from it. The grace of God is given to us at a great cost; the price was the suffering and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured the cross so that we might be forgiven and live eternally. It would do us all great good to take a very long look at the cross of Christ and to remember what He was willing to do for us. Without the grace of God, we would each one be lost and without hope. We could only expect an eternity without the blessing of God. Because of this, we must never take the grace of God for granted. It's a gift, a precious gift, but not a cheap one or one to abuse. Grace is not cheap. Since God paid the price of His Son Jesus for our salvation, and so we must not act like we can live anyway that we want to and still expect the love and grace of God to be ours. Grace is indeed a teacher, and here are some of the things that grace teaches us.

First, the grace of God teaches us gratitude. The person who understands what grace is all about will live with joy and with thankfulness. He knows that God has blessed him with salvation and new life. Paul said that Jesus "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue

us from this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). We do live in an evil age, where sin is rampant. Crime, war, deception, sexual immorality, addictions, anger, greed, selfishness, and violence fill our world. I don't know about you, but there are times that I long for a world that is better than this one, a country in which righteousness dwells. I long for a world where people keep their word, live without violence, live with justice, where love rules, where peace is common, and houses are safe. Jesus came to rescue us from this present evil age by transforming the hearts of sinful people into hearts that are filled with love and goodness. Jesus said, “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Wherever the love and the grace of Jesus has impacted lives, there is joy and peace and love beyond our imagination. I've seen desperate people come to the Lord and change their lives. God's love and grace can melt our hearts and give hope, those two wonderful gifts. Grace ought to make us thankful.

James said, “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). You can count on God to keep His promises. Gratitude is one of the great virtues of life. William Shakespeare remarked once, “How sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child!” If you're God's child, I pray that God sees how His grace has made a difference in your life. Paul could say, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). You could see grace in his life by what he did. Can God see that kind of grace in your life? People who receive the love of God learn in thankfulness to give love to others. People who receive forgiveness learn in thankfulness to forgive others. People who receive help from God in answer to prayer learn how to help others with their struggles. Gratitude changes a man from the inside so that he is ready and he's willing to bless the lives of other people.

Second, the grace of God teaches us godly sorrow. Anyone who thinks long and hard on what Jesus suffered at the cross for our sins begins to look at sin in a new light. While we are grateful for grace, grace makes us sorry that we sinned against God and that our sins brought punishment to Jesus who was innocent. To realize that Jesus died a cruel, cruel death and was punished so severely for our sins helps us to understand how utterly offensive our sin truly is. No good person would ever want to hurt an innocent person the way they hurt Jesus. Paul said, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). At some point in our lives, as we look at the cross, we must come to the awful realization that we put Him there by our specific sins. It wasn't just that the world tells lies; each of us tells lies. It wasn't just that the world is filled with greed and lust; each of us has been greedy and has lusted. When I think of God's kindness in spite of my sin, I can't look at the sins that I've committed the same way. I'm so sorry that my sins punished him and brought him sorrow. For that reason, I despise what I have done in sinning against God; I'm sorry for my sin and my guilt in this matter. I'm no better than those on Pentecost. Peter spoke to them of Jesus, “whom you crucified”, and he pointed a finger at them. But my sins also led to the crucifixion of Jesus.

Paul said, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9). If I love God, I will hate or abhor what is evil. Loving God means hating the things that oppose and offend God. I can't keep on sinning and then pray to God as if I had done nothing

wrong. Godly sorrow brings about repentance; it brings about a change in my heart that leads to a change in my behavior and my life. Paul spoke of this change, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality (or fornication), impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:5-10). Putting a practice to death is a radical change. It means that one doesn't practice that behavior ever again. That sinful way of life is in the past. Grace gives us a second chance to live a new and better life – a life like the Lord Jesus lived. The saved person can say, “I'm not all I want to be; I'm not all I ought to be; I'm not all I am going to be; but, thank God, by His mercy and grace I'm not what I used to be.”

No Christian lives a perfectly sinless life like Jesus did. Only the Lord was perfectly sinless; and we'll never measure up to that on our own. But when we do find ourselves in sin, that godly sorrow still leads us to repentance. As soon as we realize that we've done something wrong, we determine never to do it again. Some sins are easy to give up and others take some time. We're all a work in progress. God will continue to bless us as we continue to put away sin. But some people think of grace as a license just to keep on sinning, since they believe that the love of God will cover it anyway. Paul said, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:1-3). In baptism we died to that old man of sin. We don't need to bring him back; we need to leave him dead and buried. We cannot presume upon the grace of God by continuing to live in sin. We must change our lives. Grace is not cheap and we cannot presume upon the grace of God.

Third, grace teaches us to do good to other people. Jesus gave Himself for us to rescue us from this present evil age. If we're to become like Christ, shouldn't we also reach out to do good to others? Paul said to Titus that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). God not only wants us to do good but to be zealous about it! Paul said, “And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:9-10). Christians are known for their love and kindness to those who need help. James said, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). Some folks clean up their lives but they don't do much to help other people; while other folks are very kind but keep their lives in a moral mess. God wants us to do both, to live clean and holy lives while we care for those in need.

Paul said, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who was for their sake died, who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). If we love Christ and we realize what His grace has done for us, we will want to live in such a way that we show our love towards other people. Jesus

told the parable about a man who was very selfish. He said, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16-21).

Wouldn't you hate to be called a fool by God? How sad it is that many people live their lives for themselves and what they can gather together financially. They forget that they can't keep anything beyond this life. The Bible says, “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Timothy 6:7-8). Some folks are never content to give to others or to do for others, because they're like this man, consumed with themselves. This man thought he was successful, but God called him a fool. When God calls someone a fool, we should take notice. Let God's grace touch your heart and your life. Let it move you to separate from sin, to be thankful, and to do good to others who need your love. The closer you get to God, the more you'll become like Him. We hope you'll draw close to the Lord today! Let's pray together. Father, help us to draw near to You, to love You, and to be thankful for all that You have done for us, and to live in such a way that glorifies You. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

Paul said, “For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10). How sad people have the opportunity to know God's love and to be saved by the blood of Christ but do nothing with it. Paul wasn't going to let the grace that God had given to him be in vain. He determined to live a life that said “thank you” to God, that showed love to people, and that kept him free from sin. He understood what God did for him, and it motivated him to work harder than any of them. What about you?

To become a Christian, you have to obey the gospel. You do that when you believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, repent of every sin, confess Jesus Christ as Lord and the Son of God, and then be baptized (immersed in water) into Christ. Being baptized into Christ means being baptized into His death, where His blood was shed. Being buried with Him when in baptism and being raised with Him to walk in newness of life is being born again. Jesus who is the Savior will give you and me an opportunity to live a new life, to start over fresh and pure. The Lord not only wants to save you from your past sins; He also wants to give you a great future of an abundant life. I hope that you'll obey the gospel today. Don't put it off. Make a start today. You'll never regret giving your heart and your life to the Lord Jesus. Grace teaches us the joy of being a Christian.