

Program Transcripts

For February 2015



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

February 2015

FEBRUARY 1 – FINDING THE TRUTH

Where do you find the truth about eternal life? Remember you are investing your soul in what you believe. Can you find it in your feelings or in opinion polls? We look to Jesus who has the words of eternal life.

FEBRUARY 8 – WHAT LOVE MEANS

As many turn their minds to Valentine's Day this week, we wonder if people really know what love is and what it means to love someone deeply. We live in very lonely days, where many wish they could find love.

FEBRUARY 15 – A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

What would you give to have a clear conscience free from all guilt and shame? The way of the Lord is the way to peace and forgiveness. Because of the blood of Christ, we can find salvation and have a clear conscience.

FEBRUARY 22 – REJOICE IN THE LORD

The faithful Christian should pause and thank God for all His blessings and the inexpressible joy in Christ Jesus. God has been so good to us in Christ, and we can rejoice in all His blessings.

Finding the Truth

Where do you find the truth about eternal life? Now remember you're investing your soul. Today we're going to talk about the sure source of religious truth. God urges us, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Your most important purchase comes in buying the truth about God and about your salvation. Where will you find the truth? A thousand voices are confusing us with contradictory ideas and fanciful notions. Is there a standard? Is there a sure and undeniable source of truth? Yes, there is!

You've probably heard: "No one really knows what the truth is," or "There are no absolute truths," or maybe you've heard "There is no right or wrong, only what people think." Do you remember the exchange between Pontius Pilate and Jesus just before His crucifixion. Pilate said to Him, "'So You are a king?' and Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. And everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Then Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'" (John 18:37). That question has burned in the hearts of many people: "What is truth?"

Webster defines truth as, "the true or actual state of a matter." Truth conforms to reality or to fact. Truth stands against what is false. Courts seek facts to determine innocence or guilt. Doctors test to find out the truth about our health. Where do we find spiritual truth? We want to know who we are, where we come from, why we're here, and what will happen to us when we die. Humans cannot answer these questions on their own. We must seek answers from above and hear from God.

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in the Gospel According to John 14:1-6. "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

People search for truth, but some of their sources aren't trustworthy. In fact, some of those sources are downright dangerous. Let's look at some harmful sources: First, some people look to their feelings for truth. You remember that Joseph's brothers got angry with him, they sold him into slavery; but they told their father a wild beast had devoured him. Jacob believed his ten sons and thought Joseph was dead. He mourned for years, even though Joseph wasn't really dead. The feelings were real, but they were based on a lie. People often trust their feelings. They want something to be true so badly they're willing to believe a lie. What we feel often differs from the truth. The Jews had a zeal for God, but it was not in accordance to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Martin Luther who wrote, "Feelings come and feelings go; and feelings can be deceiving. I rest my warrant on the Word of God; nothing else is worth believing."

Second, some look to popular opinions or consensus for truth. They reason that if the majority believes it, it must be true; but the majority isn't always right. Opinion polls are not always trustworthy. I think of Acts 28:3-6 which tells a very funny story. "But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came and because of the heat fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, 'Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.' However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no

harm. But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.” Opinions and beliefs are as fickle and as changeable as night and day. Spiritual truth is not like popular opinions; spiritual truths don't change. You can rely on spiritual truth from the Word of God that does not change. But you can't rely on popular opinion.

Third, some go to authorities. Authorities are a blessing, but they aren't always right. Compare any history book, science book, or psychology textbook from 50 years ago to today, or even 25 years ago, to the present. Even your dictionary has more than 50,000 words in it that were not even in existence a century ago. People go to doctors and then they go to get a second opinion because they want to be sure that what the doctors told them is right. We have appeals courts because sometimes a court makes a wrong decision. Authorities disagree. We hear contradictory information about the foods we eat and the medicines we take. What is bad for you in one report is good for you in another. We're often left confused and wishing for answers. The fact is, even authorities are human and make mistakes. Their knowledge and their judgments are imperfect and limited.

Some look inside their consciences for their moral guide. The conscience, if trained properly, can be a marvelous motivator to do what's right and to avoid what's wrong; but the conscience can believe a lie, and it can be fooled. Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, “Brethren, I've lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day” (Acts 23:1). He thought persecuting Christians was the right thing to do at one point; it was already free in his conscience, but later on he found out that he was wrong! He admitted, “It's a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Timothy 1:15). He acted according to what his conscience thought was true; but Paul's conscience was as wrong as wrong could be.

Some people's consciences harden to the point that they can't feel anything. First Timothy 4:1-2 says, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.” When a branding iron affects the skin, it destroys the nerve cells too, so the person can no longer feel. You might know people who get past feeling any remorse, who no longer have a conscience. If we're only looking within our consciences, within ourselves, for truth; we may not find that standard of truth that is indisputable.

Where, then, do we find the truth? It is obvious that truth isn't in man. Jeremiah admitted many centuries ago, “I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it's not in man who walks to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Man, left to his own ingenuity, will dream up what he wants but will ignore what he needs. Solomon said, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). When people walk their own ways, never giving God a thought, they manufacture a false substitute for God. When people empty themselves of God, they fill their lives with false gods, and false hope, and fairy tales. Without God, people lose their sense of justice and morality.

Truth is essential to life. Solomon urges us as we've mentioned, “Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23). Truth is precious and it's costly. Telling the truth cost Jesus His life. The apostles died because they wouldn't deny the

Lord or His truth. One must work to get truth. Buying the truth may mean discovering what you believed before is wrong. Truth requires you to leave an old error and start a new direction; it requires you to be honest. Buying the truth will lead you to change your ways. Confessing the truth means that we may have to repent. One reason people refuse to believe the truth is they don't want to change their lives even if that old life is destructive.

Once a person has the truth, he must treasure it and never sell out for shoddy thinking or worldly ways. It's tragic that some sell the truth to gain some personal advantage. Paul challenged Timothy to "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) doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

We must find the truth because truth sets us free. Jesus promised those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Whether we know the truth matters because truth sets us free. Free from what? Free from the lies that deceive, enslave, and destroy us. When we know the truth, we can spot the lies. Then lies won't have the power to hurt us or to lead us astray.

Many preachers today tell people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. I fear many are sold on false hopes found in the teachings of men. Jesus said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted" (Matthew 15:13). The religions of men, because they conflict with the teaching of Christ, will not stand and cannot save you. When people push their own ideas and refuse to hear Jesus they are planting something that will be uprooted. By forgetting God people destroy themselves and the lives of their loved ones. Foolishness will never grant us spiritual freedom. Freedom doesn't come from falsehood or deception, but from the truth; it's the truth found in the words of Jesus that will save us. That's what makes the truth of God's Word so valuable to our lives. Nothing can replace it.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one (no one, no one) comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus personalizes what truth is all about. He's so real, so genuine, so authentic as the Son of God, that He is the truth Himself. He is the standard of right and wrong. Every concept, every belief, and every religious doctrine must be weighed against the life and the words of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). We won't be judged by our feelings, by opinions, by human authorities, or by our consciences. We'll be judged by what Jesus teaches. Doesn't it make sense then that we know as much as possible about what His will is for our lives?

The Lord Jesus said, "I have many more things to say to you (the apostles), but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes (He came on the day of Pentecost) He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:12-13). Jesus promised all truth would come to His disciples. The Holy Spirit would speak from God and would tell them what God said. He would guide the apostles and prophets of the first century into all the Truth. "All the truth." That means the Spirit revealed through the apostles in the first century every

religious truth. God wanted us to know that truth. If it's true, then there are no new truths being revealed today since the apostles revealed all truth.

Jude, in verse 3 of his brief letter, confirms this understanding when he says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." The faith that Jesus wanted us to know has been revealed once for all time within the pages of the New Testament—the Word of truth. We don't need to search the literature of the world for truth. The truth that leads to heaven is found in the Bible. We need to read it, love it, meditate on it, memorize it, obey it, and share it with others, so that they too can understand the truth.

Peter said, "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. For, All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:22-25). The Lord purifies our souls when we obey the Truth! That is when we become Christians, children of God, washed in the blood.

Truth is one of God's great gifts. While such gifts are free, they aren't cheap. The truth can change your life, but only if you open your heart and listen. Truth is like a medicine, it only works when you are willing to swallow it. It won't do you any good if you merely look at it, play with it, judge it, or throw it away. It only works when you welcome it and obey it. The truth can make you free from sin, free from the heartache and destruction that sin brings. Without the truth we're all left in confusion, trying things that won't last or won't give us life. The truth is where it's always been, in the Word of God! Many Christians find little satisfaction because they seek to hold onto Christ with one hand and hold onto the world with the other. They're never really happy in their Christianity and never really happy in the world. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24). Why not give God a real hearing. Decide to listen to God, who created you, loves you, and will change your life for the best. God ought to have the first voice in your life. The world wants to silence God because they would rather live on their own terms. They forget that they'll have to face the consequences of their actions one day. When we shut God out, we destroy what is good and we throw away our hope.

We all need a good long look at the cross. Once we see the love of God, we'll listen to Him. You can be sure of Jesus Christ and His love. You can build your life on Him and what He teaches. You can find peace because of His promises. The God who loves you will always keep His promises; He will never lie to you. Put your loving trust in the Lord. Believe the gospel message. Jesus died on the cross for you; He was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. Trust Him with all your heart, turn from every sin in repentance, confess to all the name of Jesus, and be baptized (immersed) in water so that your sins will be forgiven. When you're baptized the Lord will add you to His church and count you as His child. He'll bless your life in ways you've never imagined. Don't be fooled by popular religion, or feelings, or the notions of men. Look to Jesus for every answer to the questions of your life. You'll never regret it!

What Love Means

The highest calling of life is to love God and other people, but what does it mean to love? Today we're exploring the meaning of love. The God of the Bible is the God of love, who loves us in spite of all our weaknesses. How thankful we should be for the Bible because the Bible reveals all that God has done to bless us now in this life and in the life to come. God's Word records His plans for us and His promises. The more we learn about God, the more we'll love Him. By studying God's Word, we'll grow in our faith and our devotion to Him.

The apostle Paul wrote, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I'm 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 that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Love is the very foundation of our relationship with God. Without love, we are nothing and we gain nothing.

Imagine waking up in a world without love, a world where people don't care—and they don't care that they don't care. Small offenses would start fights and wars because no one loved enough to forgive. People would become selfish and ambitious, stepping on others to better themselves. A world without love is a world where the life of the unwanted would be cheap, where children and the aged are forgotten, and where people sit silent while evil takes place. A world without love is without hope and filled with all the ugly substitutions that people find to take love's place.

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

What does it mean to love? The love that we're talking about isn't the same thing as physical affection, though many call that love. No, "love," as it is used in the Bible, is the surrender of the self for the best interests of others. Love takes place when people put other's needs above their own. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Love is more than mere feelings, though love involves feeling. Love is an intentional act of the will; love determines to put self aside and bless the object of its love. Love sacrifices. Love pays whatever cost, gives whatever gift, and runs whatever risk to do what is best for another. It gladly gives without complaint. Love will act even when difficult things are required. Love will bear the harsh and the demanding load. Love is like a candle. It makes no noise but it softly gives itself away to be a blessing to others.

Sometimes love is serving others. At other times, love means allowing the kind will of someone else to act in our lives. Love knows how to give, but love also knows how to receive the love others graciously give. Peter didn't want the Lord to wash his feet in John 13:8, but his objection to allowing the kindness of Jesus meant that he had no share with the Lord. Love requires us to allow others to enter into our lives and to be kind to us.

Living without love means that our hearts will be empty and indifferent. We won't care about anything but ourselves. We will be like the priest and the Levite in the story of the

Good Samaritan; we'll just pass by on the other side of the road and leave others to perish. A life without love means that we'll turn inward in selfishness, wanting only to fulfill our own lusts and desires. We'll be like the foolish, rich farmer whose land provided abundantly but all he could think about was hoarding it up for himself. Living without love means we'll forget how to be thankful for what we have or how others sacrificed to bless us.

Living without love means that we won't have a relationship with God. The Bible says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). Living without love means living with bitterness. Without love, we grow angry at every offense and we plot to get even. Without love, hate flourishes. First John 2:10-11 says, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Hate fills everything with darkness, and fear, and violence. A world without love is a miserable place.

On the other hand, living with love means living with care and compassion. We see a need and we fill it; we see a hurt and we comfort it; we see an opportunity to bless and we seize it. God is the great model of love. So, what we want to do is see how God loves.

First, God's love is sacrificial. John 3:16-17 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." The entire gospel comes to focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and it draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love somebody dearly, you're willing to pay the price dearly for that person's responsive love. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price He could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus. We must be willing to give up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Second, God's love is forgiving. Psalm 103:8-12 says, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

We can understand a God who would forgive friends who ask for mercy. But we have a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them. He must possess an extraordinary love to do that! It is the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for lost people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel far from God, don't despair because God is searching for you.

Third, God's love is eternal and beyond measure. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These verses contain comforting promises. Believers have always had to face hardships in many forms:

persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. These problems could cause them to feel abandoned by Christ, but Paul explains that these things cannot separate us from Christ and His love. God profoundly loves His people.

Paul bowed his knees before the Father and he prayed “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). If we could grasp—even a little—the immeasurable love of God for us, we would love Him and love others so much more.

How then should we love others? People are not “born lovers” any more than people are born chefs. They have to learn how to cook and they also have to learn how to love. You may have the deepest of feelings, but love is a verb; it’s an act of the heart and soul. Loving somebody means that you’ve paid enough attention to their needs and their desires, that their needs and their desires become more important than your own. The Scriptures teach us why to love and how to love.

Many people want to be loved, but they don’t understand the higher calling of loving others. Love isn’t merely affection that we receive from other people; it’s our determination to sacrifice ourselves for the best interests of others. We love because we choose to love. We love because we see the value of serving God and serving others.

The Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). We show that we are the Lord’s disciples when we love like He loves. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). True Christianity calls us to sacrifice ourselves for others.

If we become distracted with how people treat us, we’ll miss how we treat others. Love means setting ourselves and our wills aside so that we can bless other people. The Bible 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

The devil leads people to be arrogant, to be offended easily, to take revenge, to slander, and to grow bitter inside. The Lord Jesus leads us to be kind, even when no one else is kind; to be tenderhearted, even when everyone else is apathetic; and to forgive, even when the world hates us. The Lord Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, that ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 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 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 5:43-48).

God calls us to be His children and He expects us to grow beyond a purely selfish mindset. The Lord God sacrificed Jesus on His own. We didn’t cry out for Him to send His Son. No! He gave Jesus because He first loved us. First John 4:9-11 says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we

might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

The Lord God forgave us, not because we deserved it but because He is so loving. He calls us to forgive—even when people don't deserve it, because we are His children. He calls us to love our enemies rather than hate them, to pray for those who persecute us, and to love those who don't love us. Why? Because we are God's children and that is the way God is.

Colossians 3:12-14 says, “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Have you put on love? Can people see the love of God in your heart and in your behavior? Do you care enough to take up a brother's burden as your own? Do you care enough to sacrifice yourself for a noble cause?

Love means ending our selfish, self-centered ways so we can sacrifice ourselves to serve God and to serve others. Life without love is empty and useless; it is sad and lonely. People who turn away from the love of God may not realize how much they've hurt themselves or what a precious thing they have lost when they lose love. When people lose love, God's love, they also lose His forgiveness; they lose His ear in prayer; they lose a room in His eternal house. Do you love God? Will you love God? Will you give yourself fully to Him?

After the wonderful chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, comes the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1, which simply says, “Pursue love.” To “pursue” means to go after something until you seize it. Paul isn't speaking here about finding someone to love you; he's urging us to pursue the practice of loving someone else. Pursuing means regularly giving of ourselves in time and effort to do what is best for others. First John 3:18 says, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Love means caring enough for others to tell them about Jesus and about His love. We preach Christ each week because we love you. When people get to know Christ, they learn to love in the fullest sense of the word. They truly put other people before themselves. They won't hurt God or others by living sinful lives when they love God. God's love and His kindness moves us, motivates us to repent of our sins and to live moral lives. Love won't let us keep on sinning against God or sinning against other people. God loves you, and He greatly wants you to be His child. So, if you open up your heart, and you begin to love God the way that He loves you, you'll change your life. You'll draw close to God and become a Christian. Because He loved you, Jesus died upon the cross to make atonement for your sins. Don't reject His marvelous gift of salvation.

Believe in Jesus, turn away from everything sinful, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. When you're baptized, you'll enter into a relationship with God that can last eternally. In baptism God washes away your sins (Acts 22:16), and He makes you His child (Galatians 3:26-27). As God's child, He will hear your prayers, He'll give you an inheritance in heaven. If God loved you enough to send His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins, will you love Him enough to commit your heart and your life to Him?

A Good Conscience

Many people carry around the baggage of sin and a guilty conscience when they don't have to. Today we're going to find out how to have a good conscience. God wants to bless us and guide us. He teaches us how to love and how to serve Him in His Word, the Bible. The Bible is full of God's grace and wisdom. The gospel contains the power of God unto salvation, and that is why we must keep studying His Word.

A Christian lady described an incident when she was only five years old. She was at her grandfather's house all dressed up in a white dress and new gloves; she was proud as she could be. Her granddaddy told her she could go into the kitchen and get herself a special cookie. Next to the cookies was a stack of quarters. Sure that no one was looking, she took a quarter.

When she returned with her cookie, her grandfather asked her to show him her gloves. She held out only her left hand and he said, "Well, show me the other hand." When she reluctantly did so and revealed the quarter, she immediately saw disappointment in her grandpa's eyes.

He paused a moment and then he "hugged me up" she said, and said "Darlin', you can have anything in the world that I have, but it breaks my heart that you would ever steal it." The woman said that even fifty years later this story of how her grandfather gave her the gift of conscience still brought tears to her eyes.

Few things can shape the values and morals of a child more than the sting of lovingly administered guilt. It helps define right from wrong and gives a powerful emotional dimension to issues of ethics and character. God Himself gave us our consciences.

Our reading today comes from the book of Romans 7:21-25. "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." A very important reading that really speaks to all of us. The concepts of guilt and shame are often confused. Guilt takes place when a person feels responsibility and remorse for some offense, crime, or sin that he or she commits. Shame, on the other hand, takes place when someone has the painful feeling that arises from the consciousness that he or she could be the kind of person who would commit a crime, offense, or sin. We feel guilt for what we do; we feel ashamed of ourselves for having done it. The young girl felt guilt for having stolen the coin, but she felt ashamed for having disappointed her grandfather. Shame follows guilt when people realize that they could do such a thing.

So, many people speak as if guilt or shame should never happen. It's an unfortunate thing that people think that. Oh, I understand that there are some cults and some parents who have abused others with shame, and I'm not supporting that. Instead, that we should feel guilt and shame for truly sinful acts is normal and actually vital to our spiritual lives. I worry far more about someone who sins against God or his neighbor and feels no guilt and no shame than I do for the person who feels shame when he's really guilty.

Some folks don't feel guilt when they sin. Many ignore the seriousness of sin. Rather than call sin evil some people describe sin as a "mistake," or "a poor judgment," or "the result of wrong influences," or even "an alternative." By relabeling sin, they have attempted to explain

away man's responsibility to God. Many consider words like "sin", "judgment", and "hell" as obsolete concepts. They would drop them from our vocabulary altogether if they could. Sin, however, is not imaginary. It's real! Its consequences are so great that Christ had to come and die to free us from them. We cannot wish away the reality of "sin." Our consciences won't let us.

Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion." Why do the wicked flee? They know they've done something wrong. After Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit, they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. They hid because they were guilty and ashamed to face the Lord for what they'd done. They had a conscience, and so does everyone, so do you. The conscience is a God-given faculty of the heart by which we know about ourselves. We know when we do right and when we do wrong. Romans 2:14-16 says, "For when Gentiles (that is, people who don't know God), who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

Our consciences accuse us when we know we've done something wrong and excuse us when we know that we're innocent. Our conscience is our moral sense. It warns us, nags us, and rebukes us when we are at fault, and then it assures us when we've done the right thing. The conscience serves as a moral monitor, and we should be thankful to God for this gift. When we sin, this moral monitor causes us to have sorrow and urges us to repent. Why do we have sorrow? Because we know that when we sin, we have offended the God who created us.

The very folks who think there's no such thing as sin still pass judgment on the wrongs of others. Romans 2:1-4 says, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" When we consider how God loves us and how we have hurt Him by our sins, it makes us want to change our hearts and our behavior.

The apostle Paul once had to rebuke the Corinthians because they tolerated sin. This made the Corinthians grieve over their wrong behavior. So Paul said to them, "For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:8-10). When people feel grief over their sins, they don't want to remain in that sin. They have to leave that sin behind and they have to do what's right.

Sadly, some people ignore their guilt and allow their consciences to become hardened. They pursue their wicked ways with such determination that they don't care what God or anybody else thinks. The idolatrous Jews in Jeremiah's day reached the point that they didn't feel shame about their sinfulness or their idolatry. Jeremiah said, "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they didn't know how to blush"

(Jeremiah 6:15). When we lose our moral sense of right and wrong, we are destined to destroy ourselves and everyone around us. When people feel no guilt, they'll feel free to do anything. The Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, had one of his characters in the book *Brothers Karamazov* say, "Well, if there is no God, then everything is permitted." When people shut God out of their lives and they harden their hearts and their consciences, they too will feel that they can do anything they please. The greatest problems of America today are not social or political; they are moral and spiritual. You cannot throw God away and expect the quality and beauty of life to improve!

Sadly, some people today will say or do any shameful thing and never blush. Many have become so desensitized to sin they will not blush about anything. It seems no sinful behavior is off-limits on television these days. Viewers seem to want more and more programs with sex and violence. One author asked years ago, "Whatever Became of Sin?", and another spoke of *The Vanishing Conscience*. Things have only gotten morally worse since then. Hebrews 3:12-13 warns us, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Instead, we should be more like the apostle Paul, who said, "I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience before God and man" (Acts 24:16). To have a clear conscience toward God means that you know what God teaches. To know what God teaches you must study the Scriptures. Many people trust their own thinking rather than listen to God's Word, and that gets them into trouble. If your conscience isn't in line with Scripture, you can sin against God and not even know it, and you certainly won't feel guilt. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Again Jeremiah 10:23 says, "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, it's not in man who walks to direct his own steps." This is why we must study God's word diligently. If I permit something in my life that is wrong in God's eyes, it is wrong regardless of how I feel about it. Remember, in moral matters that affect our souls God has the last say and the only say.

We need to make it our aim not to sin at all. Many people make it their aim not to sin so much, but God asks us to repent and to correct every sin. Pollution of the heart and soul is man's greatest threat. Many people allow little sins to grow into big ones because they permit little compromises in their lives. No one sets out to be a drunk, but only people who drink become drunks. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 16:10, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little thing is also dishonest in much." Little compromises lead to devastating problems.

You may have read sometime back about two high school boys in Florida. They drew suspensions for eating so much garlic that no one could stand to have them around. The boys said that their garlic binge began when they read garlic helps cleanse the blood and lowers blood pressure. At that point, each of them ate half a garlic head. For breakfast the next morning both students consumed three or four more heads of garlic apiece. When the teachers and the students complained about their odor, the boys simply laughed and they went on eating garlic. When confronted by school officials one of the boys protested that the smell couldn't be all that bad. "After all," he pointed out, "we were blowing in each other's face, and we couldn't sense a garlic smell."

That's how sin works; with time it destroys our sense of morality. At first people experiment, then they practice sin regularly, and eventually that sin captivates and enslaves them. People enslaved to sin will laugh and boast about it. They cause their consciences to grow callous by wallowing in the sin until it no longer smells bad to them. They are offensive to others, but act indignant when anyone complains. Since they don't think what they're doing is wrong, they don't understand why God or godly people are offended.

Sin warps our thinking about everything. Titus 1:15-16 says, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Perhaps you know of someone who has a filthy mouth and a filthy mind. They can take the most innocent things and defile them because they're defiled in conscience and soul. It's hypocrisy to talk like you know God while you live an ungodly life. You not only shame yourself, but you also lead others to blaspheme God.

The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). A person who is pure in heart seeks to please God and serve Him. He doesn't want any sin or moral stain to come between God and himself. He knows sin will separate him from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear 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 people let wickedness and sin into their lives, it builds a barrier between God and themselves. God will turn His favor away from them and will no longer hear their prayers. We cannot live in sin and expect to have the blessing of God. Do you have a clear conscience? You don't have to live with guilt or shame. God can help you.

I've spoken plainly today because I care about your soul. Paul told Timothy, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). That's our goal, too. We love you and we want you to love God. We want you to be right with God and to live with Him eternally in heaven. The blood of Jesus can cleanse us from sin, but God expects us to clean up our lives. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

When we hope in Christ, we purify our hearts and our lives. First John 3:2-3 says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." What about you? Can you say with Paul, "I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience before God and before men?"

To have a clear conscience, believe in Jesus and in His Word, repent of every sin and follow the Lord, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. In baptism we appeal to God for a good conscience. First Peter 3:21 says, "Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Won't you get right with God and become a Christian today? I hope you will.

"Rejoice in the Lord"

Many want happiness, but there's something better than happiness! What's better? Joy! Today we're going to explore the joy we have in Christ. We know God is wise and good. He will always lead us into the path that brings us joy and peace, so we turn to His Word, the Bible.

If you ask people what makes them happy, they'll usually speak about all the things they like and want in their lives. They might speak of ideal houses, cars, or jobs, thinking they can find happiness in possessions or position. They might consider the satisfaction of their fleshly desires or the accomplishment of some goal in life that will bring them happiness. Many discipline themselves to gain riches, fame, education, or maybe to set a record. These things, however, belong to this life; they're only temporal. Solomon said, "behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14). What really matters? What lasts beyond this life?

The Lord Jesus told this parable in Luke 12:16-21. "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'll do this: I'll tear down my barns, I'll build larger ones, and there I'll store all my grain and all 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." Have you laid up treasures in heaven? Is God an important part of your life?

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Philippians 4:4-7. "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Let's pray together. O Father, we're thankful for Jesus, and we rejoice that He was willing to suffer and die for our sins. And, Father, help us to love You, to serve You with every fiber of our being. And may Your will be done on earth as it is heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Every person you meet is hungry for joy. Joy is true pleasure and satisfaction over a blessing or a positive relationship. The joy that we have in Christ is a mindset of delight and well being that comes from knowing and serving God. This joy arises from all the blessings and promises that are grounded in what God has done for us in Christ. It comes from knowing God is our Father, that Jesus is our Savior and Lord. We can have no greater blessing than a personal relationship with the God who created us and can give us an abundant life here on earth and eternal life with Him in heaven. It's no wonder that Scripture urges us to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

Joy and our relationship with God are unchangeably joined. When we are right with the One who created us, who loves us, who sustains us daily, and who sent His Son Jesus to give us eternal life, then our joy is multiplied with peace, hope and gratitude. Day by day God is good and He takes care of us. Every blessing, the answer to every prayer, the forgiveness of all our sins, and the love of brethren are good reasons to rejoice in the Lord always!

Christianity is more than a faith or a religion; it's a relationship with our Father in heaven. The Lord taught us to pray to Him and to be obedient to Him. In prayer we can pour out our hearts and our requests. God has given us His Scriptures, the Bible, to guide us and to lead us in the right path. Both prayer and following God's teachings are matters of love and blessing.

The Lord Jesus said, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. And 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. These things I’ve spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:9-11). When people love each other and maintain a right relationship, joy just grows and grows.

From the time that Jesus entered this world, He has brought joy and hope to mankind. Everything about Him speaks of an abundant life filled with joy, peace, and promise! When Jesus was born, an angel of the Lord appeared to some shepherds out in the field as they were watching over their sheep. The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. Luke 2:10-11 says, “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Truly the beginning of the greatest joy in all history was the day that Jesus Christ came into the world.

Can you imagine all the joy that Jesus brought to people as He forgave sinners, as He preached the gospel of the kingdom, as He healed everyone who came to Him? The blind could see; the deaf could hear; the lame could walk; the lepers were cleansed; and those who were maimed were made whole. Jesus fed the multitudes, cast out demons, stilled the terrifying storms, raised the dead, and welcomed tax collectors and sinners. People’s lives were changed for the better for having known Jesus. He brought true joy everywhere He went.

Luke 15 contains three stories of joy, where something is lost and then found. A shepherd who had lost one of his sheep searched until he found it. With joy he calls together his neighbors and friends and asks them to rejoice with him. The Lord Jesus said, “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Repentance is a reason to rejoice. In the second story, a woman lost a coin. Searching diligently, she finds it and calls her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her.

In the third story, there is a younger son who causes himself to be lost in sin by wandering off to a far country and wasting his inheritance. A famine caused him to be destitute and hungry. When he came to his senses, he came home acknowledging his sin, but the father rejoiced over his repentant son. With hugs and kisses, the father put the best robe on him, shoes on his feet, a ring on his finger. He said, “bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:23-24). God loves to forgive people; He rejoices when people repent and turn their lives around. We too should rejoice when we see people turn their hearts toward God to follow and serve Him.

Jesus knew that He would die on the cross, and it caused Him great sorrow, to the point of death. Even those who went to the garden with Him sorrowed; Luke 22:45 says Jesus found them “sleeping from sorrow.” When He was speaking of His resurrection, Jesus said, “Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you” (John 16:22). Though Jesus suffered through a painful trial and bore an agonizing cross, He could see joy even in His suffering. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us to fix “our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” What could possibly be joyful in the cross?

The joy of the cross was not in the pain, the suffering, or the shame that the Jews heaped upon Him as they mocked Him. No! The “joy set before Jesus” that allowed Him to endure the cross came from what He was dying for. He died to save people, people who would follow Him in this life and live with Him forever. Acts 20:28 says He purchased the church with His own blood. He was willing to sacrifice Himself on the cross because He loved us. He knew that in dying, we would come to understand just how far He was willing to go to demonstrate His love and to save us from our sins. He knew that His death would make a difference in our lives. So He rejoices every time a sinner repents and comes to Him. That’s the joy that’s set before Him.

When the women came to the tomb after the resurrection, they came wanting to anoint the body of Jesus early on the first day of the week, and they saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. A severe earthquake had occurred, and an angel had rolled away the stone. The guards shook for fear of Him and became like dead men. Matthew 28:5-8 says, “The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.’” They left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and they ran to report it to His disciples. Jesus conquered the grave, and we can rejoice in the promise that He gives to us that one day we will rise from the dead.

You may be going through a tough time right now. You might not have much to rejoice about or to be thankful for. But even in our heartache, the Lord Jesus can bless us. James 1:2-4 says, “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.” Your struggles may be the very thing that allows you to grow and become the person that God wants you to be. So rejoice even in your trials. Like Paul, we can say, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). If all we see is the suffering, we may miss what great things God has in store for us.

Christians find their joy not only in what the Lord has done in the past by forgiving their sins but also in the future. Paul spoke of “Rejoicing in hope” (Romans 12:12). We have a living hope in Christ that cannot be taken from us. First Peter 1:3-5 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Salvation and a home in heaven are certainly great reasons for joy. In fact, verses 6 to 9 say, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you’ve been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

Christians will suffer various trials and tests; but when Christians face trials, their faith sustains them. God sees the proof of their faith and blesses them for it. Though we’ve never

seen Jesus, we love Him. Though we do not see Him now, we expect to see Him when He comes again. So, we rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible because we know that we have a place reserved in heaven just for us. Nothing can take away the joy that comes with a living hope.

God proved His love for us by sending Jesus to us, and Jesus proved His love for us by dying upon the cross. When we demonstrate our faith and love for Him, our faith becomes more precious than gold. Our faith will result in praise and glory and honor from the Father. One day the Lord will reward those who remain faithful. Paul proclaimed, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I've fought the good fight, I've finished the course, I've kept the faith; and in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Do you love His appearing? Do you love the Lord? Do you rejoice in all that He has done for you? Do you have that hope and that promise deeply in your heart and soul? If not, I hope you'll consider the things that we've talked about. Let's pray together. Father, help us to love You with all our heart and soul, and to do Your will. Father, we rejoice for the forgiveness of our sins and for the hope of eternal life. Father, we know that You have a place prepared for us. May our hearts and our lives be set upon doing Your will on earth, just as it's done in heaven. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, Amen!

Let me repeat: everyone hungers for joy. You do, and I do. The joy that we want and need is more than a temporary happiness that perishes. We want a joy that can never fade, a joy that lasts forever. There can be no greater joy than this, to know that we are forgiven, to know that we are walking in the truth, to know that we're right with the living God, to know that He hears our prayers, to know that He watches over us, and to know that He has prepared an eternal home in heaven for us. Lasting joy, which is so much better than a temporary happiness, comes only from Christ!

The wonderful thing about the joy of Christ is that the more we share it, the more we have. Paul wished that everyone were a Christian, and so do we. We rejoice when we hear of people repenting; we rejoice when we hear of souls forgiven by the Lord; or our fervent prayers being answered causes great joy. We rejoice when people are baptized into Christ Jesus so that they may become children of God; and we rejoice when saints are called home to be with Jesus. Indeed, the joy of the Lord is our strength as Nehemiah says in Nehemiah 8:10.

I'm, asking you, do you have the joy of the Lord in your heart? Do you have the joy of your salvation? Are you at peace with God, knowing that God has forgiven your sins? If you have unresolved sin in your life; if you have strayed from the straight and narrow road; or if you're a prodigal son or daughter; you're missing the joy that God wants for you. Give your heart and your life to God.

To become a Christian, believe in the Lord Jesus and His words with all your heart, then repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). When you are baptized; God will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16). After the Eunuch was baptized, the Bible says that he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:38-39). You can too, when you are obedient to the will of God.