

# *Program Transcripts*

For May 2016



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**May 2016**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **MAY 1 – WERE YOU THERE?**

A spiritual song asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Have you considered the part your own sins played in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Have you thought about how you should respond to the cross?

## **MAY 8 – FORGIVING YOURSELF**

Many Christians feel the nagging sting of shame and guilt. They still worry over sins long forgiven by God, but they do not know how to forgive themselves of their transgressions and iniquities.

## **MAY 15 – WHAT GOD WANTS FOR YOU**

As parents Jackie and I wanted to give our children the very best we could, because we loved them. In the same way our Father in Heaven wants to meet our needs and give us the best life possible.

## **MAY 22 – THIRSTING FOR GOD**

Some come from church full of hope and zeal, while others in the same worship service come out empty. Why the difference? It could be that some have lost their passion for God. How can we renew our passion for God?

## **MAY 29 – SEARCH ME, O GOD!**

Even when no one else does, the Father in Heaven knows everything about me. He knows how I think, what I say, and what I do. Would I ask the Lord to open my heart and see if there is any hurtful way in me?

## Were You There?

A spiritual song asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” In our rush to judgment over who was responsible for the death of Christ, we often overlook our own role, that Christ died for each of us. Were you there? I’ve always loved that old spiritual song, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Nothing in life reaches into our souls as does the story of Jesus Christ dying upon the cross. So many emotions just rise up inside of us.

When I consider the cruelty of the scourging and the crucifixion, I become angry and ask “how could they treat an innocent, godly person like that?” When I consider Judas, I wonder how he could betray the Lord Jesus. When I think of Pilate, I wonder why he did what was easy and wash his hands of my Lord. Where was his courage? Then I look at myself. When I think of my Lord, I wonder how He could love me enough to bear such agony for my sins. I’m utterly grateful that He loved me so much and was willing to redeem me with His blood. Yet, I’m ashamed for all my sins. I’m so sorry for all the evil things I’ve said or done, all the pain I’ve caused, and all the times I’ve failed to do the right thing. Going to the cross humbles me and yet blesses me at the same time.

Our reading today comes from Acts of the Apostles 2:22-24. “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” That’s the story of the death of Jesus.

The four gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are inspired by the Holy Spirit and describe the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. I have merged these four accounts from their words to give a fuller picture of what happened.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, the father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country. They compelled this man to carry His cross. When they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when He tasted it, He would not drink it.

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also His tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” Then they sat down and kept watch over Him there.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the

Jews said to Pilate, "Don't write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. Those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you're the Son of God, come down from the cross."

So also the chief priests, and the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way.

One of the criminals who was hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you're under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." One of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to Him to drink. The others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."

Then Jesus calling out with a loud voice said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (that is to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up His spirit.

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" All the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.

Behold, the curtain, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Since it was the day of Preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of

the other who had been crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—and his testimony is true, and he knows that he's telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

The death of Jesus on the cross was unlike any execution ever known. He was innocent, but He bore the sins of the guilty. While being nailed down, He prayed for His Father to forgive his executioners because they didn't know what they were doing. The Lord Jesus, because He was Divine, could see what we cannot see and He knew what we cannot know. He knew His Father's plan to offer His body as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, but they didn't understand, they didn't know. First Corinthians 2:8 says, "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

When a person was executed in those days, the Romans posted the charge against the man on the cross to warn others not to commit the same crime. His accusers charged Him falsely with blasphemy in saying that He was the Messiah, the King of the Jews, yet they resented the sign that proclaimed Him King of the Jews. Pilate sought to offend the Jews with the statement, but he spoke more of the truth than he knew.

Peter speaks of the remarkable courage and inner strength of the Lord Jesus in His suffering. The Bible says, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When He was reviled, He didn't revile in return; when he suffered, he didn't threaten, but He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly or righteously. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. For by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like straying sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:21-25).

There is no wonder the centurion who saw the crucifixion proclaimed, "Truly this man was innocent." Guilty men don't act the way that Jesus acted. They don't refuse a drink that would help them with the pain. They don't ask God to forgive their executioners. They don't keep quiet when being mocked. They don't have the sun being darkened and the earth shaking. Jesus was indeed righteous and innocent.

Pilate said four times that he found no guilt in Jesus. Pilate offered Barabbas, hoping to free Jesus; but the high priests and the scribes incited the people to insist on the crucifixion of Jesus. Pilate washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to that* yourselves." All the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to the crowd, "Behold, the Man!" So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." My friend, Jesus was no ordinary person. The Jews delivered Jesus up to Pilate, not because He was guilty, but because they were envious of Jesus.

At the sixth hour, the sun did become dark. The sun was not darkened for a few minutes, as it is in an eclipse. This was different; the sun was darkened for three full hours. The Bible says that the earth shook so violently that it split the rocks. My friend, only God could do this and God did it.

The veil in the temple was torn from top to the bottom. The temple veils were 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and four inches thick. They were so heavy that we're told that 300 priests were needed just to move each one of them. The veil being torn or rent from top to bottom suggests that God's own hand had done it, He tore it in two. That veil separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Once the veil was torn, that place ceased to be separated or holy.

In His death, the Lord Jesus opened a new and living way to enter the holy of holies. Hebrews 9:12 says, "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

Jesus died a cruel, agonizing death for you and me because of His great love. God was in Christ at the cross offering us redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation. God showed his amazing and wonderful love in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus upon the cross in order to reach into our hearts, to reach into our souls, and to bring us back into a right relationship with Him. He wanted His children to love Him. He wanted His children to be right. He was willing to send His Son Jesus to die for us so that we could be right with Him, so that we could love Him, so that we could have a home with Him forever and ever. Nobody, nobody will ever love you like Jesus loves you. Nobody will ever die, and could die for you, the way Jesus died for you. Were you there when they crucified my Lord is a great question because if you've not seen what He did for you, I hope that one day you'll take a look. That you'll see the love and the glory and the grandeur of God's caring for us. My friend, you were there when they crucified the Lord. Oh, not physically, but in a spiritual sense. Remember that Jesus died for you to save you from sin and open a way to have a relationship with you. He died so you could be reconciled to God in a new covenant, so that you could have a loving relationship with God the Father that would last forever. In that sense, you were in His heart and you were there.

God took the initiative to show His love in the hope that we would respond to it with a total commitment of our own love. We should love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, all our minds, and all our strength (Mark 12:30). Committed love is willing to go to any length to comply with what the Lord desires.

We're saved by God's goodness and grace; and God's offer of salvation through the cross extends to every person. We can't earn our salvation, but we can meet God's conditions for salvation. God wishes everyone would respond to His love, but He knows that not everyone will. We hope and pray that you will respond to Him.

Respond to the remarkable love of God with a love of your own. That love should lead you to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess Jesus before others, and be baptized. Baptism into Christ is the immersion of a penitent believer in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). These things you must do if you wish to show your love for God and become a Christian.

If the cross means anything to you and if you realize that your sins were involved in sending Jesus to the cross, you won't wait even one day until you come to the Lord in love and obedience. Won't you do that today?

## Forgiving Yourself

Many Christians feel the nagging sting of shame and guilt. They still worry over sins that were long forgiven by God, but they don't know how to forgive themselves of their transgression. In today's study, we're going to learn how to forgive ourselves.

A fellow once came into my office to talk. Soon he had tears in his eyes. He sat in a chair across from me and said, "Years ago I committed a terrible sin. I'm so ashamed I can hardly talk about it. I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself. I feel so dirty, as if I'll never be clean. I became a Christian a few years ago and it seemed to help. But, ever so often, I remember that sin and I feel lost all over again. I don't feel fit to be a Christian." What this man said is not uncommon; many people have a hard time forgiving themselves.

The problem is not God's ability to forgive the penitent believer, but in the believer's willingness to forgive himself. God is willing to forgive, but some people don't feel forgiven, or feel saved. A person who's never forgiven himself feels shame in his heart every day. When David sinned with Bathsheba, he admitted, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3).

David felt God's hand on him because of his sin. He said, "There's no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there's no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me" (Psalm 38:3-4). Your sins may be too heavy for you too, but there's a God-given solution to shame and guilt!

Our reading comes from Psalm 32:1-5. This is a Psalm of David. "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away, Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." That was David's heartfelt thought about his own sins, and I know that you may be thinking about yours. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful that in Your grace and mercy You forgive us. Father, help us as we strive to serve You. We confess to You, Father, our weaknesses and we're thankful for what You have done for us in Jesus Christ. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesu's name, Amen.

When a person sins, he sins against God, but many ignore the harm that sin causes to the person who commits it. Sin is an offense against God, but it's also against one's self. The Bible personifies wisdom in Proverbs 8:36, "But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death." Wisdom is God's revealed will for our lives. When people go against God's wisdom and His will, they live with the sting of guilt and shame.

The inspired apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will 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" (Galatians 6:7-8). Sin is the cause of the worst heartaches of mankind. A person can't live for sin and self and expect to find the blessing of God.

The conscience is a God-given function of the heart. The conscience works as a moral monitor praising us or condemning us. The Bible describes this function in Romans 2:14-15. God's Word says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of

the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”

When a person sins, his conscience pricks his heart and that causes pain. This pricked conscience causes a person to be grieved at himself; he can lose all respect for himself. The prodigal son no longer felt worthy to be called the son of his father. You might think the conscience is a bad thing, but it was the prodigal son's conscience and the terrible effects of his sin that brought him to his senses. God didn't give us a conscience to punish us, but to keep us from doing what is wrong and to encourage us to do what's right. When we fail to listen to our conscience we end up hurting ourselves.

Everyone has a conscience, but not every conscience uses the Word of God as a basis for what is right and wrong. Many people sin against God but don't realize that what they did was wrong. They rely on their own experience or their own judgment rather than take the time to study the Scriptures and learn what God says on the matter.

Other people allow sin to harden the conscience. The Bible 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's called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12-13). I worry far more about the person whose conscience is past feeling than the person who feels great sorrow for his sin. When a person gets past feeling guilt, it's not likely that he will repent. If a person sees no need to repent or won't repent, he likely won't ever get right with God.

Of all of God's blessings, nothing is more valuable than forgiveness. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. Forgiveness is “forgetting against.” When God forgives, He no longer counts our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). As part of the new covenant, God promises, “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12).

David, by inspiration, wrote, “He (that is God) 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 towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:10-12). When God forgives, He no longer thinks of us in terms of our past iniquities. He removed the offenses from His mind, but He keeps us close to His heart.

Forgiveness ends the shame and guilt by blotting out the offenses and settling the matter once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:24). Forgiveness means putting to death the old man of sin (Romans 6:4-11) and making all things new (2 Corinthians 5:17). When you forgive yourself, you forget your past sins against yourself. You no longer hold those sins against yourself, and you will be at peace with yourself.

You cannot forgive yourself until you have made a change in your heart and life. That is, you must repent. Many people seek forgiveness but they never leave their sins behind. You'll never find peace if you're unwilling to repent. If you commit the same old sins over and over, you'll keep on having the same defeat and shame over and over.

The Bible says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. And in these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, and wrath, and malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do



not lie to one another, seeing that you've put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:5-10).

Here are four things you can do to forgive yourself. First, be sure that you have genuinely repented. Repentance is not only a turning away from sin; it's also a turning toward God. The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). You'll have a hard time forgiving yourself if you fail to fill your life up with God.

The Lord Jesus warns us about giving up sin but not filling our lives with spiritual things. In the book of Matthew 12:43-45 He talks about this, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but it finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. And then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

Second, to forgive yourself, focus your attention on what you have become, not on what you were! I'm not all I ought to be; I'm not all I want to be; I'm not all I'm going to be; but, thank God, by His mercy and grace I'm not what I used to be. The apostle Paul was guilty of terrible sins when he was Saul of Tarsus. He was guilty of violence, murder, slander, and blasphemy. He persecuted the church beyond measure and cast people into prison for their faith.

In 1 Timothy 1:12-16 Paul said, "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Paul couldn't change his past, but he didn't focus on the past. Paul said he was "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). He focused on what God was doing in his life and what God wanted him to do. Knowing God's forgiveness, he could put his past behind and focus on the will of God. He could say, "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" (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

A person who forgives himself can say, "I'm not what I used to be." God is more interested in what you are becoming in Christ than in what you "used to be." You can't change the past, and it's not necessary for you to do so to forgive yourself. What you can do is change yourself and your attitude toward the past by becoming the person God wishes you to be. In doing this realize that no one is perfect but God. When you start living for God, you no longer have to be ashamed of your past. You can be happy that you serve Christ.

Third, trust God rather than your feelings. Feelings represent perceptions, but these feelings are not always true to reality. Feelings accurately reflect how we *perceive* things to be but they don't always reflect reality. The brothers of Joseph sold him to some slave traders, and Joseph went down to Egypt. The brothers, however, claimed that a wild animal had killed Joseph and they dipped his coat of many colors in blood. The brothers lied to their father, Jacob. Jacob tore

his clothes in grief; he wore sackcloth; he mourned for his son many days. He refused to be comforted. Jacob said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol (that is, the grave) to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him (Genesis 37:35). Jacob believed Joseph was dead and he mourned, but Joseph wasn't dead. Jacob believed the brothers' report but didn't know the truth. Joseph was very much alive. Jacob was mistaken and so were his feelings. Martin Luther wrote, “For feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving; my warrant is the Word of God, Nothing else is worth believing.”

People often feel unforgiven, even when God promises in the Bible to forgive. Trust God not your feelings. So trust the Bible to tell you the truth. God doesn't lie. God can and He will keep His promises. The Lord Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” But he also said, “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:34, 36).

Fourth, draw close to God. If you wish to be at peace with God, don't flirt with the sins of the world. The Bible says, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7-8). When God rules in your heart and life, when you draw near to God and resist the devil, you'll find your life growing better and better.

The Bible says, “Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” The double-minded fellow who wants to be a friend to God and a friend to the world never finds peace or assurance. If you want a clear conscience, “submit to God” (James 4:4). When you draw close to God and start resisting the devil, you'll find the strength to live a righteous and holy life. You'll find that things that used to tempt you aren't appealing anymore.

My friend, you can forgive yourself, and God can help you. Won't you let Him? Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your grace and mercy to help us to forgive ourselves. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesu's name, Amen!

People think they can get away with their sins, but there are always two persons who know how and when we have sinned no matter how secret we make it. God knows and we know. David thought he had hidden his sin with Bathsheba, but it wasn't hidden from his own heart.

David said, “When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; And my vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I didn't hide; I will confess my transgressions to the LORD; and You forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:3-5).

God forgives us so that we can forgive ourselves. We can rid ourselves of the old self and be born again. God can do away with our body of sin. When we get right with God, we find peace with God and we find peace with ourselves. Forgiveness takes place in the heart of God; it's a gift of mercy. You can't earn it. Mercy takes place when God does something for us that we're not capable of doing for ourselves. Your salvation, your forgiveness, is the gift of God.

But you have to accept that gift. That means being honest with yourself and honest with God in confessing the sin. To become a Christian, we must trust God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must turn from sin and turn to God; that's repentance. We must confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as our Lord before others; and we must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water of a penitent believer. If you need to do these things, why not contact a nearby church of Christ and get your heart and your soul right with God.

## What God Wants for You

As parents, Jackie and I wanted to give our children the very best that we could because we loved them. In the same way, our Father in Heaven wants to meet our needs and to give us the best life possible. Only in Christ can we find the abundant life; that's what we'll explore today.

When God, your Father, created you, He created you with love in His heart. God said to the nation of Israel, “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope’” (Jeremiah 29:11). God has plans for our lives, too! He wants to bless our lives and meet our needs. The Bible says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (James 1:17).

All the physical blessings we enjoy, however, are not going to make up for what our spirits need. We're spiritual beings with souls, and the physical things of this life will not provide for the things that we need inside our hearts and souls. We need God in our lives. He's the difference between wisdom and foolishness. He's the difference between existing and an abundant life. He is the difference between chasing after the wind and living with meaning and purpose. God knows what is best for us and He wants to provide the things that we need most for our souls.

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verses 31 to 39. “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather He who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 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.” God is our Father and, like any good parent, He wants what's best for us spiritually because He loves us and He knows that our spiritual well being is vital. In this lesson, I want us to explore seven things that God wants for our lives. I'm so thankful for the Bible because it helps us understand the very heart of God. The more we know God, the more we'll love Him and want to follow Jesus Christ. Here are seven things God wants for our lives.

First, God wants you to be saved. The Bible says, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). There's nothing in this world worse than being lost in sin. God says in Ezekiel 18:4 that the soul that sins will die. He's not here speaking of physical death, but spiritual death which is far worse.

Sin is a terrible thing. The Lord Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Sin will separate you from the love of God and from His blessing. But God has a plan for us to save us from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ when we believe in Him and obey His commandments.

Some people think God made up His mind long ago who would be saved and who would be lost, but this simply isn't true. God gave us the truth, which teaches us how to be saved; and He gave us free will, which allows us to choose to follow Him or to reject Him. God, however, wants us to choose Jesus and to be saved. He doesn't want anybody to be lost.

The Bible says, God is speaking, “‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,’ declares the Lord GOD. ‘Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore, repent and live’” (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Second, God wants you to come to know the truth and to be free. The Lord 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). God gave us His Son, Jesus, so that we might come to know and understand His love for us. The Bible says, “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:17-18).

Some people say they believe there is a God in heaven but we don't know anything about Him. Oh, but we can and do know something about Him. We can know God through looking at Jesus. The Lord Jesus once said to the apostles, “‘If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:7-9). We know the Father by knowing the Son!

Third, God offers us the privilege of prayer. In fact, God wants to hear from us. The Lord Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:7-11).

We don't have to beg God to let us pray to Him; the Lord invites us and wants us to bring our requests to Him. Just as a father loves his children, so our Father in heaven loves us. He wants to hear from us and to have a relationship with us. The Bible is how God speaks to us, and prayer is how we speak to God. God loves us enough to hear our words and our hearts. He will always answer with what is best for us, not always with what we want, but always with what we need.

Fourth, God wants us to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in this present age. The Bible says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11-14).

God wants only what is best for us. Living sensibly, righteously, and godly blesses our lives and blesses those who surround us. God's grace and forgiveness open an opportunity for us to leave a sinful and destructive lifestyle for one that is godly and productive. The gospel of Christ transforms lives from selfish to loving, from hurtful to helpful, from dishonest to devoted, and from troubled to trustworthy. God's grace works through the Word to teach us to hate what is wrong and to love what's right.

Fifth, God wants you to have an abundant life. The Lord Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly" (John 10:10). Everybody wants to be happy, but "the abundant life" is far greater than merely just being happy. It has real, inner joy, real life. It is a complete life; it's a life "to the full." Christianity is a way of life that doesn't lack any worthy thing that we need.

Sinful pleasures may satisfy for a moment, but they cannot give you the lasting joy of the Christian life. Sinful pleasures are deceptive; they promise much but destroy those who pursue them. Sinful pleasures are addictive, enslaving, and destructive. God wants something better for His children than slavery to sin. He offers the spiritual, which is so much better than the fleshly. God's Word says the Father "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

In Christ, we have God's amazing grace to sustain us, God's abundant love to comfort us, God's hope of heaven to give us endurance, and God's Word of wisdom to guide us. In Christ, we've become God's holy and beloved children. Being God's child is the greatest privilege. Nothing else compares.

As part of the abundant life God gives us, He gives us the church as a family. As part of the local church, we have brothers and sisters who know us and love us, who encourage us and watch for our souls. As part of a local church, we have a place to worship and to grow as children of God. God gave us the church to bless our lives and to help keep us strong in our faith and love for Him. Living as a part of God's family, the church, and serving Christ gives us a great sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Number six, God wants you to find peace. The Bible says, "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" (Philippians 4:6-7). God knows that we often come on tough times. Just like any Father who loves His children, He puts His arm around us and says, "Let me handle it." When we put ourselves into God's hands, He sets a guard around our hearts and our minds and protects us from doubts and fears. He replaces all our worries and uncertainties with His perfect peace. Isaiah 26:3-4 says, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, *we have* an everlasting Rock."

In Philippians 4:8-9 God's Word 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's any excellence and if there's anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things that you've learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." When people think good thoughts and live righteous lives, they can go to sleep at night with a clear conscience knowing they're right with the living God. The peace that passes understanding is truly, truly a blessing!

Number seven, God wants you to come home to live with Him forever. The Lord Jesus said, “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” (John 14:1-3). The Lord has prepared and reserved a place with your name on it. God intends to bless us in ways far beyond our understanding. The Bible says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7). God wants to give you a marvelous, amazing home forever in His house as part of His family.

These are only seven things God wants for you and for me. There are many more. To enjoy them God wants your heart and your life. You can’t please God and remain on the fence or apathetic. You have to come to that point where you make a commitment to God from this day forward and forever. The Bible says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God wants you to find His love by changing your life. You must leave the old way of sinful pleasures and follow Him into the abundant life. Today is the best day to get started on a new and better life!

The most important thing that we can do in response to God is to love Him with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. A person who loves God will act upon that love by placing their faith in Christ (John 3:16), repenting of every sin (Acts 2:38), confessing the name of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 10:32-33), and by being baptized (that is, immersed) in water for the forgiveness of their sins. When a penitent, believing person is baptized, the Lord washes away his sins (Acts 22:16), adds him to His church (Acts 2:47), counts him as His child (Galatians 3:26-27); He buries him and raises him up with Christ (Romans 6:4-5), and He saves him (1 Peter 3:21). This is why it’s so necessary to be baptized. That’s when God acts upon you. Baptism is not something that we do; it’s something that we have done to us; God is the one who acts in baptism.

God wants you to live with Him forever. The way to live in His house forever is to come into His family in this life. The church is God’s family (1 Timothy 3:15). As His child, you will want to be with other members of God’s family by attending church regularly. God has designed the church to meet your spiritual needs and to provide the loving family you desire.

God’s arms are open wide, and He longs for you to come home to Him and to the family He has on earth. No one will ever love you or ever bless you the way God loves and blesses you when you become one of His people. No one else can provide a home reserved in heaven for you. No one else can give you a Godly, loving family like Christ does. Won’t you come to Him; won’t you serve Him, won’t you live with Him? If you’re looking for a close, loving, personal relationship with God, why not visit one of the churches of Christ near you? They’re loving brothers and sisters who want to help you to go to heaven. My friend, you’ll never regret doing what is right, but you’ll forever regret passing up the gifts of God. God wants you to act in this life so that you can enjoy the blessings of the life to come.

## Thirsting for God

Why do some people pursue life with hope and zeal, while others muddle through life empty? Today, we're going to explore how to renew our passion for life. The Word of God has the best instructions for life here and the only instructions for life hereafter.

I love the inspired words of David, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). David knew how much he needed God and how lost and alone he felt without God. Are there times in your life when you feel empty and alone? Perhaps the reason for this emptiness is that you're not as close to God as you once were.

Some people live their Christian life to the fullest, while others just drift aimlessly. Some are passionate about their faith, while others are apathetic. Some come out of church full of hope and zeal, while others who were in the same worship service come out empty. Why the difference? Could it be that many have lost their passion for God? Today, we're exploring the Scripture and asking, "How can I renew my passion for God?"

Some folks have never been close to God; they don't know what they've missed. My friend, I pray that you'll look deep into your soul and ask yourself if you have a close and loving relationship with God? Would you like one?

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians 4:4-7. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, 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." What a great passage. Let's pray together. Father, we're so grateful that You do protect us and help us. And, Father, we find our joy in You and in the Lord Jesus. And we're thankful that we can come to You with our burdens and that You will help us. Father, help us to live by Your will always. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty? Have you ever had the kind of thirst that demands a drink of water now? I've been out hunting and walking through the forest loaded down and desperately needing a drink of water. Or, I've been out mowing the lawn in the summer, and my face is red, and I'm so thirsty I could drink from a garden hose. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). Jesus used two familiar things, hunger and thirst, to teach us how God looks at righteousness. God blesses the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, and God will give him satisfaction.

Much of Judea is a dry country. The people who live there know what it's like to have little water available. The hills of Judea contain numerous cisterns to collect rain water for the times when the dry seasons come along. They knew water was essential to life, and they must have it. God, too, my friend, is essential to your life.

When was the last time you were really thirsty for God? When did you last hunger to be close to God? When did you last hunger to worship, to praise Him, and to thank Him? When was the last time reading the Bible or hearing a sermon from God's Word was an immediate demand? It's so easy to forget what you need to be healthy and right with God.

Some people take for granted that God is always there, always cares, and is always available when they need Him. They have room in their lives for God when they hurt and

they need Him, but they ignore God until some real need arises. Their relationship with God is really part-time. Their lives say to God, "I want you when you can benefit me, but don't get used to being a part of my life." They aren't really close to God.

Part-time Christians don't want to be close unless they want something from God. They have a shallow relationship. Let me ask you, would you like to be married to someone who only wanted you when he or she needed you but didn't care other times? Christianity is a heartfelt, daily relationship with the Lord. We must not let our love for God grow stale.

If you want a relationship with God that is vibrant and living and full of love and joy, you must grow beyond having God around only when you need Him. The Lord Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when he was tempted by the devil. He said in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Many people cheat themselves out of a real life by focusing on everything around them, but God. They listen to the talk shows; they go to the movies; they know their soap operas, they read newspapers and magazines; they know every sports figure; but they haven't read a single book of the Bible in years. No wonder their lives are filled with doubts and confusion and misunderstanding. When they push the Bible away, they're pushing life and God away.

The Bible is no ordinary book; it is God's book and God's way of teaching and training us how to live. It teaches us how to love, how to forgive and to be forgiven, how to react to suffering, how to grow on the inside in spirit, how to discipline ourselves, how to live without hurting other people, and how to make the most of our lives. The Bible gives us hope and promise; it gives us joy and peace; it uplifts; it comforts; it corrects; it trains; and it makes us new. The Word of God is what gives us new life and causes us to be born again.

Look what the apostle Peter says in the Bible about the Bible. This is an amazing promise! 1 Peter 1:22-25 says: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly {fervently} from a pure heart, since you've been born again, not of a perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower fails, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this is the word, that is the good news that was preached to you." God's Word is the key to being "born again." No other book can forgive your past and give you the promise and hope of living forever! The more you read the Bible, the more you will come to know and to be close to God. The more you read the Bible, the more you will come to have the abundant life found in Christ Jesus!

So, start paying attention to God and to His Word. Our passion and feelings for God die when we remove ourselves from God. People don't intend to get away from God; they simply drift away unconsciously. The Bible says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-3). A person can slowly stop reading the Word of God, stop praying, and stop going to church. Before long, he's drifted away from the God who loves him.

Desperate situations sometimes wake us up and lead us back to God; and we finally realize that we have no one else. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I've been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." It's reassuring



to remember that God can do things that men cannot do. There is really only one true God who can hear and answer prayer; and that's the God of the Bible! Oh, I know it's not politically correct to say things like that, but political correctness is not the measure of truth. Political correctness is often the world's way of putting God to silence. When people listen to the world and forget God, they end up ruining their lives. Every social ill in America comes from people ignoring the will of God. We need God. We need His hope, His promises, and His laws to live good and peaceful lives. There is simply no other way.

We can draw close to God by making Him a priority in our lives every single day. Every day make time for God. Spend time in Bible study and prayer. Don't simply read the Word of God; study it and meditate upon it. Psalm 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." God wants to feed your spirit with his Word, the Bible, and to give you the very insights you need to prosper in every area of your life.

God also wants you to draw close to Him by opening your heart to Him in prayer. First Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." God is not saying pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No one could do that. Instead, God is telling us to stop quitting on prayer. Some folks stop praying altogether. That's what God doesn't want you to do.

Some folks think they're bothering God by praying, but God doesn't feel that way. He invites us to pray, to ask, to seek, and to knock. He's ready to answer, to give, and to help us find what we're seeking. Prayer was God's idea, so let's rid ourselves of the notion that God is too busy for us or gets bothered by prayer. God loves you so much that He wants to hear your prayers. He wants to hear your hearts.

If you want to be closer to God, let me suggest that you do this one, simple exercise every day. "What is it?" It's this: count your blessings. Remember the good blessings that God has given to you. Remember, God saved you from sin, delivered you from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Remember the cross, the love that Jesus showed by suffering for you and me. Remember how God has answered your prayers. Remember how the Scriptures gave you hope and comfort. Remember the strength that God has given you to deal with the challenges of life. He's been blessing you through the years. Just look how God has helped you and is helping you now.

Count your blessings, and when you do it's so healthy for your spirit and your attitude. The Bible teaches, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

When we concentrate only on the negative, we lose sight of God. When we concentrate on the positive, we grow more thankful to God. Every day we need to stop and say to God, "thank you, thank you, thank you for all that You do for us."

There's one more thing about God's blessings that we must remember. God has lovingly prepared a future for us, one that gives us hope. The Bible 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 an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, you who

by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). As Christians, we have the true and living hope in the true and living God. We have all the blessings of God in this life and we have heaven, too! In Christ we are of all people most blessed.

Is there anything in your life that keeps you from being close to God? Is there anything in your life that robs you of energy and time so that you're so overly tired that you don't have time for God? Some people day after day shut the Lord out of their lives. Hebrews 12:1-2 says: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which so closely clings to us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

There may be many things in our lives that tangle us up. Some things are not sinful in and of themselves, but they so distract and rob us of time with God that we lose sight of the Lord who loves us. We also have to think about sin. Yes, sin, ALL sin separates us from God. The Bible says, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid *His* face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). If you want to draw close to God, you have to clean the sin out of your lives. I hope that you'll do that today. Let's pray together. Father, help us to love You with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. And give ourselves fully and freely to You in our time, and in our efforts, and in our obedience. And Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Several years ago, a middle school in Oregon faced a unique problem. A number of the girls began to use lipstick. They'd put it on in the restroom and then press their lips against the mirrors, leaving dozens of little lip prints. This went on for several days. Finally, the principal decided that she had to do something to stop this problem. So, she called the girls to the restroom with the custodian. She explained that lip prints caused a major problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every single day. To demonstrate how difficult it was, she asked the custodian to clean one of the mirrors. He took out a long-handled brush; he dipped it in the toilet; and then he scrubbed the mirror. Since that time, there weren't any more lip prints on the mirrors. If we could see the filth in sin, we wouldn't be so attracted to it. God hates sin. He calls it iniquity because it twists and ruins lives.

God loves you and wants something better than sin will give you. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Our Father in heaven wants us to live with joy and purpose.

We can live abundantly when we give our hearts and our lives to the Lord. So put your trust in the Lord Jesus. Believe His Word. Turn away from the ugliness of sin. Sin may give you pleasure for a moment, but it will rob you of your soul. Out of love and faith, with a penitent heart, confess Christ as your Lord and the Son of God and be baptized or immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the time God forgives our sins. It's also the time that we enter into a relationship with God and He adds us to the church. I hope you'll do that today, that you'll obey the gospel and be baptized.

## Search Me, O God

Even when no one else does, the Father in Heaven knows everything about me. He knows how I think, what I say, and what I do. Would I ask the Lord to open my heart and see if there is any hurtful way in me? Am I willing to rid my life of every sin? These important questions challenge us to live by a higher standard.

I hope and pray that you make it your goal each day to live pleasing to the Lord. It's amazing how many take the grace of God for granted and never think about improving their spiritual lives. The apostle Paul said, "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). Each of us must one day face the consequences of our behavior. How does God see you?

Have you made it the business of your life to grow in your faith, your love, and your zeal for the Lord? Many people live lives in complacency, thinking that because they're under the grace of God they never need to mature or grow. But God expects all of us to examine our hearts and to see if there are things we can do better. As we study from the Scriptures today, I hope you'll take a long look at your heart, your life, and your soul. Are you living as God wills? Could there be some sinful or hurtful way in you?

Our reading today comes from one of David's Psalms, Psalm 139:1-6. "O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thoughts from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it." Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful that You know us so well, that You do encompass us before and behind, and that You know us and love us all the same. And, Father, we pray that our love for You may grow more and more. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

One cannot think about this magnificent Psalm, Psalm 139, without the overwhelming realization that God is present with us. He sees and knows everything about us. He searches our hearts and knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows how we think and all our actions. Psalm 139 says, "You know when I sit down and when I rise up." God knows our thoughts. Psalm 139 says God discerns our "thoughts from afar." The Lord even knows every word we speak. Psalm 139 says, "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether."

The Bible says God encircles us. "You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me" (Psalm 139:5). The fact is that you cannot go anywhere that God isn't already present. You can't run away from God. Psalm 139:7-12 says, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."

God is both omniscient (that is, all-knowing) and omnipresent (that is, everywhere-present). He's not limited by space or time; and nothing escapes His notice. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." No one can escape

the presence of God. This fact ought to warn us that we must have pure and holy lives. God said in Leviticus 11:44 and again in 1 Peter 1:16, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Again, the Bible says, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). God expects His people to forsake their sins and live holy lives. God will not tolerate being put in second place to our sins. God wants to be first in your heart, in your life, in your thoughts, and in your words. David knew that God would not tolerate wickedness but would one day slay the wicked.

God knew about us even before we were born. Speaking of God, David said, "For you formed my inward parts; and you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; and in your book were written, all my days, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Psalm 139:13-16).

Because David knew that God saw every aspect of his life and that sin would displease God, the Father, he asked the Father in Heaven, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous (any sinful) way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23-24). David wanted to please the Father so much that he wanted God to search his heart and life to see if there was any grievous or hurtful way in him. God would already know it. God didn't need to search to find out. It was David who was the one who needed to know. He didn't want anything to come between God and himself. He wanted to get rid of the hurtful way and be led in the everlasting way!

David was saying, "You know, Father, if there's something wrong with me, I want to know it so I can change my ways." This we all need to consider! David wanted so badly to stand right in the sight of God that he opened up his life to God's scrutiny. We might be able to fool others; we might even fool ourselves about our sins; but we can never, never, never fool God! David was afraid that he was ignorant of a sin, or he had blinded himself to a sin he was committing. Oh, how people tend to do that this day and time, of blinding themselves to the things that God calls sin.

We must all be concerned about whether we are living in sinful ways and don't even recognize it. Perhaps we're entertaining some wicked thoughts or failing to do our duties as Christians. God's Word tells us the things that we must do and the things that we must not do. They're clearly set out in Scripture, but many people live their lives completely oblivious to their own sin. I'm reminded of Proverbs 30:20, which says, "This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, 'I have done no wrong.'"

Sin is deceitful. People who commit sin don't like to acknowledge that they could have done such a thing. The more people sin, the more likely they are to excuse themselves of sin. They often re-label sin to soften the sting and to make it appear innocent. For instance, a person isn't greedy; he has "business savvy." Or, a drunk will hardly ever admit that he is intoxicated; instead he'll say he's "high." A gossip may never admit he or she is backbiting; instead, they're merely being zealous against sin. Many people shape their principles according to their practice rather than shape their practice according to their principles.

Sin is able to deceive us because sin colors our judgment. If I allow a certain lust in my heart to continue, it won't be long until I find a way to approve of my own actions. People just naturally begin to think that whatever pleases them must be all right. The same passions that

lead people into sin blind them to its deceitfulness. So they begin justifying their behavior. For instance, the more we hate someone, the more inclined we may be to tell ourselves this person is rotten and deserves to be hated. We may even tell ourselves that we're right to hate others. Sin corrupts the heart and it makes its thoughts twisted.

This is why the Bible says, "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's called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13). Sin deceives us, blinds us to ourselves, and then it hardens our hearts toward Christ and other people. Many people who get caught up in sin grow angry at anyone who thinks what they're doing is wrong. But, inside they know the truth; they just don't want to face it, and that's why they become angry.

Proverbs 21:2 says, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart." If given enough time, you can justify to yourself whatever it is you want to. Just because you think it's all right, doesn't mean that God approves of your sin. Even if everybody in the world says it's OK, it doesn't necessarily mean that God approves of that sin. Basically, what people do is they tend to lie to themselves. We can't always trust our own hearts. The Bible says, "Whoever trusts in his own mind (his own heart) is a fool, but whoever walks in wisdom will be delivered" (Proverbs 28:26). That's why we need to study our Bibles. Don't trust in your own thinking as to what is right and wrong; trust the wisdom of God found in the Word of God. God's the one who's going to judge in the end; you need to listen to what He has to say and not put your blinders on, but hear Him and not try to argue with Him.

People easily see the faults of others but they seem to miss even the most glaring faults of their own. You remember the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 7:3-5 about unfair judging: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

When some people see the errors of others, they can quickly condemn them; but it seems easy for people to excuse themselves for committing the same sin. Romans 2:1-3 says, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Paul urged the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (2 Corinthians 13:5). So, let's ask ourselves some questions that search our souls. Let's see if there is any grievous or hurtful way in our lives. Let's see if we pass the test.

First, do I believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Do I believe that He died for my sins and that He was raised up; that He really died on the cross; he really did resurrect from the dead. Do I believe the Bible is truly inspired of God and free from error? Do I believe the Lord Jesus is coming again one day to judge the world in righteousness according to the things that are written in the Book and according to our deeds? Do I really, really believe? If I don't have faith in Christ, there's no way that I can please God at all. I have failed the test.

A second question is do I love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? We might easily say that we love God, but do we love Him completely and freely? Do we put Him first in our lives, our decisions, our plans, and our time? Do I pray regularly and fervently? Do I study and meditate on God's Word? Do I tell others about God? Do I turn to God when I hurt? Am I compassionate toward those who hurt and those who are poor? Have I encouraged anyone lately? Am I willing to be a bigot towards other races or be prejudiced towards those who are not like me?

Do I let the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life lead me away from God? Do I have pet sins that I keep committing? With what kinds of things do I feed my heart? Do I think pure thoughts or do I allow sexual sin to flirt with me? Do I allow my eyes to see things that I shouldn't see or my ears to hear things I shouldn't hear?

Do I allow my heart to indulge in envy or jealousy? Do I fuss with others often? Do I gossip? Am I greedy? Do I support the Lord's church generously? Am I grateful for all the blessings that God gives to me and my family? Do I tell lies? Am I honest in all my dealings with others? Do I cheat on my taxes?

The grace of God provides a wonderful blessing of forgiveness, and we all desperately need the grace of God. But God's loving grace should lead us to repentance and a change of ways. We must never presume on the grace of God or think the grace of God allows us to continue in sin. Oh no, God's gracious gift of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was done so that we might be forgiven; and it was not a cheap gift. It deserves to be taken seriously. So, let's examine ourselves so that the grace that God has given us may not be in vain. Let's pray together. Father, we're so grateful for the grace that You have given us through the blood of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life. And, Father, help us not to take these things for granted, but that we may live out lives that please You. May Your will be done on earth in our lives, as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

In Psalm 26:2, David asks God, "Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind." Could you ask God to examine you to see what kind of person you are? Would you want God to look into your heart? What would He see? Would you want Him to look into your mind? Would you want Him to know what you're thinking right now? God already knows what's inside of you, but are you willing to face yourself spiritually that you might correct what is wrong? Would you be willing to see if there is any grievous way in you and then give it up?

David could say in Psalm 26:1, "I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering." Can you say that? In verse three, David says, "For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness. I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked." Can you say this?

As you look at your life, you might ask yourself if you have made a firm commitment to God. God has loved you enough to send His Son to die for you. Have you come to Him? A person makes a commitment and becomes a Christian when he believes with all his heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. A person who commits to Christ will recognize Jesus as Lord, turn away from every sinful thought or behavior, and turn to a life that pleases God; that's repentance. A person who commits to Jesus will confess Him before others and will be baptized in water for the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2:38). Oh, I pray that you'll do that today!