

Program Transcripts

For June 2016



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

JUNE 5 – BORN AGAIN

Occasionally we hear of people speaking about being “born again.” What does it mean to be born again, and how are we born again? Is being born again some “better felt than told” experience? Let’s see what the Bible says.

JUNE 12 – AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

When people hear the word “Christian,” many imagine things quite different from what the New Testament teaches about Christianity. What is authentic Christianity really like? What does God’s Word say about Christianity?

JUNE 19 – KNOWING CHRIST

If you could draw close to someone who could give you eternal life, would you want to meet Him? Getting to know Jesus Christ through Scripture should become one of our highest priorities as Christians.

JUNE 26 – YOU CAN BE SURE

While this world is filled with uncertainties and disappointments there are some things that are always true. You can be certain about them. Yes, there are some absolute truths that never change.

Born Again

We hear a lot of folks talking about being “born again.” What does that mean? Today, we’re going to explore what it means to be born again! We explore God’s Word because it contains the words of eternal life. It teaches the most important lessons and it gives us hope.

Today we’re asking: what does it mean to be “born again” or “born from above”? Is it some kind of “better felt than told” experience? Is it some spiritual feeling? Some people speak of “born again” Christians as if they were a special kind of Christian; but, the fact is one must be “born again” to be a Christian at all. Since there is a lot of confusion about what it means to be “born again,” it’s worth our while to go back to the Bible and see what God says about being “born again.”

Born again . . . Within the heart of most people is the desire to start over. We see our sin and we regret our past. We wish we could start over and do things differently. Some people even despise the person that they’ve become and they just wish they could be somebody else. The Lord gives us that opportunity, an opportunity to put away the old sinful person and to put on the new man in Christ, to change our lives, our attitudes, and our behavior. Today we’re going to explore what this means and how this happens.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to John 3:1-7. “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You’ve come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” Let’s pray together. Father, we’re thankful that we can be born again, that we can have a different life, that we can make things new and be new creatures. Father, help us to do Your will always. And may Your will be done earth in our lives as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, said, “Rabbi, we know that you’re a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” The Lord Jesus is indeed the Son of God, but what He told Nicodemus was unexpected. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The words “truly, truly,” show that He is serious. The word “truly” in Greek actually is the word “Amen.”

Nicodemus questions, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (verse 4). Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, should have understood what Jesus was talking about. Gentiles who became proselytes were thought to be “born again” when they were baptized. Nicodemus was not a proselyte. He couldn’t imagine being compared to one of them.

Jesus makes it clear, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:5-7). Even a ruler of the Jews needed what Jesus required for eternal life.

Jesus said, “You *must* be born again.” That little word “must” means it’s necessary if you want to please God. “Must” refers to a “moral necessity.” Jesus later said that he “must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed,

and be raised up on the third day” (Matthew 16:21). Jesus saw the cross as necessary. If you or I enter the kingdom of heaven, we must first be born again of water and the Spirit. No matter who we are—even Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, had to be born again in baptism to go to heaven.

The baptism of Jesus was a birth of water and the Spirit. Both water and Spirit were involved. Water is involved, of course, in that baptism is a dipping in water, an immersion. The Holy Spirit is involved through the Word. Peter explains this, “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 abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:22-23).

Without the preaching of the gospel, we would not believe or know what we must do in order to obey the truth. But it's in obeying the truth that we purify our souls and are born again of the Word. The Word is an *imperishable* seed, and it's for all generations. As a seed, what it produced in the first century, it will produce today. That's how we know we are Christians today like they were in the first century; we have obeyed the same gospel that they did. Born of the same seed they were born of.

The gospel produces faith in us. The Bible says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). The more we listen to God's Word, the greater our faith will become. One listens, then because of faith he wants to obey that gospel. It's when the Word works on our heart that it brings about change in life and we become a new person—truly born of the Spirit by His seed, the Word.

The Bible explains this new birth, and where we came from, and how God has blessed us. “For we also once were foolish ourselves, (we were) disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7). We needed God's grace; and we needed saving! He was willing to do that through the washing of regeneration.

God's grace and mercy saved us. We didn't earn it; God gave us His grace through “the washing of regeneration” and the “renewing by the Holy Spirit.” The phrase “washing of regeneration” refers to a washing that causes one to be regenerated, that is “born again.” This “washing” is a clear reference to baptism as the time of the cleansing from sin and being born from above. Let me emphasize that it is God who washes us and the Spirit who renews us. We are washed in the blood of Jesus who died for us. Some people think baptism is a work of men; but in baptism God does the work of cleansing, regenerating (causing one to be born again), and the renewing.

How do we get this new life? The Bible says, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we've become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (Romans 6:3-7).

To be reborn, one must first die to self and to sin. You're either a servant of sin or a servant of the Lord. It's only when you're crucified with Christ in baptism that you die to the old man of sin, and then you can be raised to walk in newness of life—and be reborn! That's the real meaning of bearing a cross. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

That new life begins at baptism but lasts our whole life through. When you're baptized, you're born into the family of God. Jesus said, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, and who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). By faith in God's Word, we obey Christ. We purify our souls by obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22). This is why we don't question if we should be baptized; we do it out of love to obey Him and to be pure. It's obedience to the Word, the seed, that opens the door for us to be born again by God.

When you're born again in baptism, you become a new creature. The Bible says, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ the old man of sin has been put away, crucified with Christ, so that a new man in Christ has come to be.

Ephesians 4:17-24 describes the change that not only takes place spiritually but also in our lives day to day. "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you didn't learn Christ in this way, if indeed you've heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, that you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The new birth changes hearts, attitudes, desires and purposes. The new person wants to be like the Lord in all holiness.

This is the kind of life a Christian should live when he's born again. Ephesians 4:25-32 goes on and describes this. "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and *yet* do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you."

Christians leave the sinful and turn to the holy in character because they become like Christ. Paul said, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, and joy, and peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). A person who is born of the Spirit shows these things.

When you're born into the family of God, you have God as your Father. As a Father, God

protects, provides, guides, instructs, and corrects. God gives His children the privilege of prayer, listening to every request and every concern. He not only listens; He answers. In Christ, we're deeply blessed. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every (every, every) spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ." Being born into the family of God gives us all the privileges of God's favor and it gives us an inheritance. We are fellow-heirs with Christ.

When you're born into God's family, the Lord adds you to the church and He writes your name in the Lamb's Book of Life. God says, "So then you're no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and you are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22). You can do nothing more important than to be born again!

God wants you to be born again and to come into His family so He can love you and be close to you. So put your trust in Him and turn away from sin. When you out of love obey Him in baptism, He'll crucify the old man of sin and cause you to be born again. Oh, what a blessing! Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You can take us from our old sinful ways, and help us to become new people, new creatures in Your sight. Father, help us to be obedient to Your will in everything that we do, and to love You and to love one another. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Being born again changes our lives entirely. Peter said of Christians, "But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

We turn from being a "nobody" to being "somebody" with God. We turn from shame to being a saint and from darkness to light. That's what it means to be born again, God's great blessing!

Some people ask the question, "Can God really make me over?" They feel so ashamed of their past, they don't believe they can live the Christian life. Oh, my friend, there's good news for you. If you want to change—I mean really want to become a child of God—there's room in the heart of God for you. The apostle Paul wasn't always an apostle. He was once Saul of Tarsus, a man who blasphemed Christ and persecuted Christians. He described himself as the chief of sinners since he had violently persecuted the church. Paul said, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, (and then he says) among whom I am foremost *of all*" (1 Timothy 1:15-16). The Lord loves every person on this earth, and the people He died for were all sinners.

Paul continues, "Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Oh, the Lord will also show you patience. You can go to heaven. You can be saved from all your sins and live eternally. How? You *must* be born again by believing with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ; repenting of your sins; confessing the name of Jesus; and by being baptized (that is, immersed in water) for the forgiveness of your sins. That opportunity is yours if you'll take it and receive it. Don't just believe, act on your faith!

Authentic Christianity

When people speak of Christianity, it's often quite different from what the New Testament teaches about Christianity. What is authentic Christianity; what is it really like? If you ask the question, "what is Christianity?" people will give you all kinds of opinions. They'll tell you what they think Christianity is or what they wish it were. People see Christianity historically and socially as it appears in America; but if that's all they see, they may never know what Christianity really is. Today we're exploring the question, "What is authentic Christianity?" Is the Christianity we see today what God intended when He sent Jesus into this world? In the early days Christians were known among themselves as "brethren," "the faithful," "the elect," "saints" (all of them were called saints), and they were also thought of as "believers." But people outside the church called them "Christians." This term came by the will of God, and it was universally accepted.

You might think the word "Christian" would occur frequently in the New Testament, but it occurs only three times. The word "Christian" refers to an individual who "belongs to Christ." Originally, words that ended in the letters "i-a-n" applied to the slaves belonging to the great households; it had passed into regular use to refer to followers of an individual or a party. Some Bible dictionaries define the word "Christian" as "The name given by the Greeks or Romans, probably in reproach, to the followers of Jesus. It was first used at Antioch." However, the name "Christian" is far more than that, as we will see.

Our reading today in the New Testament comes from the book of Acts 26:24-29. "While *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you're out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad.' But Paul said, 'I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' Agrippa *replied* to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to be a Christian.' And Paul *said*, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'"

The first time "Christian" is used in the New Testament is Acts 11:25-26. "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." The word for "called" here is *chrematisai*, not the common word for "called" from the word *kalleo*. *Chrematisai* refers to a divinely revealed name or instruction. The name "Christian" didn't actually come from men; it came from God in fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 62:2: "The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD will designate."

To call myself a Christian means that I am a servant of Christ. I wear His name; I follow His teaching; I call upon him as my Lord, and share in His spiritual and moral way of life. A disciple is a person who imitates his master, becomes like him in manner, in speech, in mind, and in behavior. The disciples were called Christians. Both words, "disciples" and "Christians," show the close relationship between the Lord Jesus and those who follow him. I am happy and honored to wear the name of Jesus Christ. I love Him and I want to wear His name. And I don't mind the world knowing that I am His servant.

The second time the word “Christian” is used is also found in the book of Acts. In chapter 26, Paul is defending himself and his faith before the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king, Herod Agrippa. “‘King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.’ And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?’ And Paul said, ‘Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains’” (Acts 26:27-29). Paul wished everyone were a Christian, and so do I. I hope you’re a Christian.

People choose to be Christians; nobody is born one. We might be born into a family of Christians, but that doesn’t make us a Christian. We have to decide for ourselves. We must be born again to become a Christian. We do that when we by faith decide to follow Christ and to be baptized. The Bible says, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, that you’re slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18). You can become a Christian by your heartfelt obedience to the gospel. Each of you, each of all of us, must choose to believe and to obey.

The Bible teaches in Ephesians about the transformation that takes place when a person becomes a Christian. “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They’re darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that’s in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves over to sensuality, to greed and every practice of every impurity. But that’s not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you’ve heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:17-24).

You must make a true change when you decide to become a Christian. You must leave an old sinful way of life, a way that’s darkened and futile; and you must put on the new way of life that is patterned after Jesus Christ. A Christian who loves the Lord no longer wants to live the way the world lives. He sees an abundant life that is higher and nobler than his old way. Christianity is the way that people become new. They’re no longer darkened in their understanding, living callous and impure lives. In Christ, they have learned a better way, full of love and full of good deeds. People learn Christ, and as they grow in their knowledge, their lives become better and better.

The third Scripture which mentions the name “Christian” is 1 Peter 4:15-16. These verses say: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” In this passage, the Bible says that one should not be ashamed of being a Christian but to glorify God in THAT name, that God-given name that associates us with Jesus Christ, our Lord. Christians were undergoing serious persecution at the time that Peter wrote this to them. I could see how some might feel hesitant to admit that they were Christians, if it meant persecution. Others might hesitate if they acted sinfully and brought reproach upon their faith. But wearing the name of Christ honorably glorifies God. This is truly the name that God designates for his people.

The apostle Paul, like Peter, was willing to endure whatever shame and punishment was necessary in order to preach the gospel and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul felt obligated to serve the Lord in a pagan society. He said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:14-16). No one has to be ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus because of all the good that Christ does in their lives.

A Christian doesn't have to be ashamed when he wakes up without a hangover. A Christian doesn't have to be ashamed that he tells the truth, that he keeps his word, that he practices what is right, and that he loves his neighbor. The way of Christians is God's way, God's plan to bless all of mankind. That's why Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are God's people making a difference for good and right in an evil world. In their lives they prove what the will of God is, that which is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

What does it mean then to be a Christian? It means: I don't belong to me; I totally belong to my Lord Jesus Christ. I have given Him first place in my life. I believe what He teaches. I practice a life that imitates Him. He loves, so I love. He gives of himself, so I give of myself. He avoids evil, so I avoid evil. He kept his heart right, so I keep my heart right. To belong totally to Christ is a radical notion. The reason many people wonder what a Christian is arises from the fact that many so-called Christians play with the notion of following Christ but never fully embrace the idea that we fully belong to him and not to ourselves.

Many think being a Christian is a great thing until it interferes with what they want to do. They're willing to let God be a part of their lives to some extent, but they're unwilling to follow Jesus when they don't agree with Him or they don't like what He asks of them. They like Jesus until he interferes with their freedom to live as they please. Such people may call themselves Christians, but they're only fair-weather Christians.

They've forgotten the price that Jesus paid to redeem them. The Bible says, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold (you know, God could have made all the silver and gold He wanted; you could have been redeemed by that, but that wouldn't have cost anything; no, it wasn't by silver or gold that you were redeemed), but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The Lord Jesus paid His precious blood to save and redeem you from sin and from hell. What He has done for you and will give to you far outweighs any earthly pleasure. We all ought to count it an honor to belong to Jesus.

The Bible says, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and then transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Jesus took us from sin and darkness and brought us into the kingdom of hope and peace and promise. He rescued us from an evil world and brought us to the love of God. How could we imagine living ungodly lives when we consider all that he has done for us? First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

In the book of Philippians, Paul described himself in chapter one and verse one as a bond-servant of Christ Jesus. To be a bond-servant means that I am a slave, a slave in chains to my Lord. The Lord owns me, and He has a right to make important decisions that affect my life,

decisions that I cannot change, that I cannot overrule. Christianity is not a democracy where I can vote things in and vote things out; it's a kingdom. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is in charge; He makes the rules; and we must submit our hearts to Him.

So much of what people think of as "Christianity" is changed from what Jesus meant for it to be. People have filled it full of human creeds and human traditions so that it hardly resembles His divinely revealed will in the New Testament. For many people, Christianity is like a smorgasbord laid out for them, and they can pick and choose whatever they like. In their minds you pick the kind of Christianity, the kind of Jesus that you want. You pick the kind of church that you like. You pick what you want to believe and you can leave the rest alone if you like. Many fail to hear God fully but hear only what they want to hear. That kind of religion is not the Christianity of the Bible; it's the kind of Christianity that people manufacture for themselves. It's not divine; it's human!

New Testament Christianity is built upon the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! It's built on divine truth found in the Scriptures because God never lies. Jesus loves us so much that He willingly died for us. His grace and forgiveness are available to all. He's the Lord of all mankind, you and me and everybody. His words are the final authority for our faith, our practices, and our morals. You may think that you have a say so, but God has the last say, and what He says is powerful and authoritative. His promises are open to all who will believe and obey, and He's coming again to judge the world in righteousness.

Biblical Christianity is the most exciting, fulfilling, powerful, and loving life imaginable. To have Jesus as Lord and Savior, and God as our Father is the best life with the best mission and the best result. God wants us to spread the good word to everyone. In Mark 16:15-16 Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Jesus is in the saving business, and His church is the way that He spreads the gospel to all.

People often define Christianity unfairly. Many don't understand the Christianity of the New Testament. Talk to some about Christianity and they bring up the crusades or witch trials. But neither the crusades or the Salem witch trials or the inquisition reflect New Testament Christianity. Titles, robes, cathedrals, and icons don't show simple, New Testament Christianity. Monasteries, and incense, sitting on flagpoles, vows of silence, and forced celibacy don't reflect the Christianity of the Bible. Worship concerts, enterprises, fake healings have nothing to do with the Christianity of the New Testament. If you want to know what real Christianity is, look in the Scriptures. The New Testament gives God's truth.

New Testament Christianity is God's way to bless this world with love, with purity, with grace, with hope, and with heaven. Titus 2:11-14 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."

Are you one of the redeemed? Have you become a Christian? To become one, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, repent of your sins, confess the name of Christ, and be baptized. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His church. He'll rescue you out of the domain of darkness and transfer you into His kingdom. Don't let even one day go by outside of Christ or true Christianity.

Knowing Christ

People say, “knowledge is power.” If you could closely and personally know someone who could give you eternal life, would you want to meet Him? Eternal life can be yours! If we could live forever with good health, joy, peace, and love, we’d feel truly blessed! The fact is: while this life on earth is temporary and filled with troubles, there’s an eternal life beyond filled with joy, peace, and love. You can have this eternal life and much more; it’s free! It comes by the grace of God and by knowing Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus in a prayer to His Father said, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

Eternal life is not merely living forever and ever; eternal life is a quality of life built upon a relationship with God who gave us our life. We have eternal life because we know—and we have that close relationship with—God! To know God well will bring about love and devotion. To let God’s wisdom permeate our heart and our life brings about the greatest blessings. God’s life is the best life forever; it’s true life forever; it’s love forever; peace forever, and joy forever! Eternal life can be yours, if you let it.

The inspired apostle Paul said, “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:7-9). Eternal life means I belong to the Lord, and I belong to him now and in the life to come.

Our reading today comes from the lips of Jesus in The Gospel According to John 17:1-5. “Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.’” Let’s pray together. Father, we’re so grateful for Your love; and we’re thankful that Jesus has allowed us to know Your will, and to know You. Father, help us to be good students of Your Word, to love You, and to serve You. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesu’s name, Amen!

Jeremiah 9:23-24 says: “Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD.” More than wisdom, more than might, and more than riches, God wants you, each of you, to understand and know Him. In God’s mind, that’s the greatest blessing and the greatest need of our time. My friend, can you say honestly that you understand and know the God of Heaven and His Son Jesus?

The Lord Jesus said, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). There are different levels of knowing. We might say we know Tiger Woods, but most of us have never met him face to face or shook his hand. We know a little about who he is, but we don’t know him personally. The next level is that of an acquaintance, someone we’ve met but aren’t necessarily close to. Then there are

colleagues who share some part of our lives. A colleague may or may not be a friend. A friend is someone you truly care for and are interested in. You want to be around a friend; you like him. Then, there is family. Families live and work together; they know each other at a very deep level. The Lord Jesus wants us to know Him on that deep family level.

We cannot say that we're really close to the Lord, however, if we don't know and obey His will. The Bible says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'Well I've come to know Him,' and doesn't keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. And by this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He (that is, Jesus) walked" (1 John 2:3-6). Many people claim that they're close to the Lord but show by their lives that they're only deceiving themselves. Knowing God is the same as loving Him; and our love for God is perfected by keeping His commandments.

Some think they can know God by getting out into nature, but nature won't tell you all you need to know about God. One comes to know God through a study of God's Holy Word. The apostle Paul wrote, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom didn't come to know God, but God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). It takes hearing God's Word, the message preached and recorded in the Bible, to know God. The Bible helps us to understand who God is and what His will is for our lives.

The Bible says, "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they're sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:14-17). We come to trust in God by hearing what He has to say in the Words of Christ.

Scripture speaks of the noble-minded Bereans who were hungry to find out what God says. Acts 17:11 says, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether those things were so." The Bible helps us distinguish what is and is not true about God. Many articles and television programs say things about God that simply are not true. But you can always trust your Bible to tell you the truth. You should check what you hear by the Scriptures. Without the Scriptures we lose spiritually. There's a significant difference between people who know the Lord and people who don't.

People who don't believe in God or love God don't realize what they lose in rejecting God. They become futile in their thinking, selfish, callous, and confused. People who ignore God turn to selfishness and sin which ruins their lives. It ought to be obvious to all of us. When fleshly ways control our lives, we get in a terrible mess. The Bible says: "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, in things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). You can't have sin as the focus of your life and expect to find favor and joy with God.

Whether a person truly loves God matters. One who loves will not live like one who doesn't love. When someone doesn't love and respect God, he becomes selfish and apathetic. But someone who knows the love of God becomes caring and generous. One lets sin enslave him, while the other finds freedom in Christ. One lets his selfish desires rule his life, while the other lets Christ be Lord of his life. Our society is morally confused because it has set God aside. People ignore God to their own destruction.

God spoke through the prophet Hosea to Israel who had forgotten Him and had followed the pagan nations. They no longer knew God, and their apathy toward God ruined them. God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6). When people reject God, they rob their children of an opportunity to know the truth about God and about the life that God gives.

A recent survey said that eighty percent of American adults recall attending church regularly as children, but many have wandered away from their spiritual roots. They've been lured by the worldliness of our culture that has pushed God out and brought in an anti-God, anti-church mindset. This mindset confuses children morally and spiritually. We constantly teach our children that moral truth is relative and not to judge anything as right or wrong. What happens? We have more immorality than we've ever had, and we have more confusion than we've ever had. In a world without God, people do unspeakable things. Without God reigning in their hearts, you can be sure that sinful, destructive things will control their lives.

The Bible says: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they didn't honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man or of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 1:18-26).

Again, the Bible says: "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it doesn't subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:5-8).

God loves us so much, however, that He wants to win our hearts and our minds away from what will destroy us to what will bless us. God wants to bring you back to Himself. That's why He sent Jesus into the world. Romans 5:6-8 says, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God was willing to go to that extent so that you might have a better life on earth and live with Him in joy and in love forever.

We can know God by looking to Jesus. The Lord Jesus told his disciples, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him, and have seen Him” (John 14:7). Again, in John 1:18, Jesus explains God to us. We know a better way of life because of the love and the goodness of Jesus Christ. He is the example of what righteousness and goodness is. He teaches us by his life what real life is all about.

Jesus can make such a meaningful difference in our lives if we are willing to let Him. The Bible says, “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we’ve done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).

God wants something better for us, lives full of hope and love, not sin and apathy. He wants to free us from the enslavement of sin so we can live righteous and productive lives. God knows how sin destroys our lives and homes and how it separates us from everything that’s good. Through Jesus Christ, God opens a door to life that rises above what the world offers. The Bible says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). The most beautiful, wonderful people I know have Christ in their lives. The Lord Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly” (John 10:10). I’ve seen what Christ can do in the lives of believers, and I know what He can do in your life. Let’s pray together. O Father, we’re thankful for the Word You have given us so we might know You and Your son Jesus, and for the joy and peace and love You’ve given us through Him. Father, we’re so grateful. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

If you let Him, Christ can transform your life here on earth and give you eternal life with Him in heaven. When I think of heaven, I think of Ephesians 2:4-7. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you’ve been saved), and 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 toward us in Christ Jesus.”

God wants to lavish the kindness of His grace and love on you forever. He starts that process on this earth by giving us the gospel, a message of good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus died for your sins, so that you might be forgiven; and God raised Jesus up from the dead, so that you might be justified and have hope of eternal life. You can have this life when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus.

“Without faith,” the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6, “it’s impossible to please God.” Out of this faith and love for God, you must turn away from sin in repentance and turn to the Lord. When you confess the name of Jesus as your Lord and Christ, you are ready to be baptized—that is immersed in water—for the forgiveness of your sins. God will forgive your sins; add you to the church, His family; and call you His son or daughter. It’ll be the beginning of a new life that can last forever. I hope you’ll be baptized this very day.

You Can Be Sure

While this world is filled with uncertainties and disappointments, there are some things about which you can be certain. There are absolutes that never change. We go to the Bible because we know the Bible has proved itself true time after time.

I get to travel throughout the United States and usually fly out from the Oklahoma City airport. I sometimes have to fly when the skies are filled with dark clouds and rain. You can easily get wet and cold. Going through the airport lines and waiting to board the airplane can be stressful. But there's an experience in an airplane that never gets old to me. It reminds me of something that I need to know. No matter how dark, how wet, how cold, or how dreary a day may be, the sun still shines above the clouds.

The clouds may temporarily block out the sun, but the sun is still shining. Life may seem dark and dreary on earth, but the brightness of the sun hasn't diminished one bit. Truth may seem hidden for a time by our culture, but it's not lost or any less true. The Bible urges us to "Buy truth, and do not sell it, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Buying the truth means taking the time to search it out in the Word of God. God wants us to know the truth and to live it out in our lives. Today, I want us to explore some lasting truths that are unchangeable and undeniable. They're truths about which you can be sure.

Our reading today comes from Peter's first letter, chapter 1, verses 22 to 25. "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."

Some things are disposable, some last for years, some last a lifetime, and some last forever. Many people live for the present and lose sight of what lasts forever. We're wise when we seek what is eternal.

Thousands of years ago, God told Noah, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). What God told Noah has remained true to this day after thousands of years: the regular passing of day and night and the seasons of the year have not changed. The whole world depends on these reliable laws. The earth rotates every twenty-four hours. It takes the Moon 27.32 days to go around the Earth once. It takes the Earth 365 and ¼ days to circle the sun. How come there's been no change in all these years? It's because God regulates it and God keeps His promises. He is the power behind it. You can be sure.

The Bible praises Moses for his wisdom in choosing what is lasting. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."

Moses realized that there's something greater than being Pharaoh's grandson. In spite of all the riches, power, and advantages of being Pharaoh's grandson, Moses chose to live like an Israelite. In those days, God's people of Israel were enslaved to Egypt and treated horribly.

But Moses chose the God of Israel over the gods of Egypt because the God of Israel was and still is the true God.

We all live between two worlds, one filled with physical things and one with spiritual. We must understand that what we see physically in this world is not all that exists. The apostle Paul said, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

What are some of these eternal, absolute truths? What is eternally sure and certain? There are at least five things more certain than the shining sun. You can count on them as more certain than a twenty-four hour day. They are spiritual truths that are eternal, and they will last longer than the earth. You can be sure of them. They are absolutes.

First, you can be sure that God exists and He is eternal. The Bible says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). The existence of the sun, moon, and stars speak clearly of the eternal powers and the divine nature of God. Psalm 19:1 says, "The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."

Our own physical bodies bear witness that a very powerful and intelligent Being created us. The more you know about how complex and intricate your body is, the more you'll realize that we could never be the result of an accident or evolution. We are designed physically and morally by God. It's clear that God designed us to live in this world. If this world was different or we were different, we could never have survived. Without an intelligent Designer and a moral Designer, this world wouldn't make sense. My friend, you can be sure there is a God.

Moses proclaimed, "LORD, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:1-2).

Second, you can be sure that Jesus is the Divine Son of God. The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3). In verse 14 of this same chapter, John 1, the Bible says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus has always been Divine. He became flesh and dwelled among us.

The Scriptures go on to say about Jesus, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:35-36). God has made Jesus Lord and has given everything into His hands. He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He is Lord of all and has authority over all flesh (John 17:2).

Moses predicted that Jesus would come and be Lord of all. Acts 3:22-24 quotes Moses saying, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to

that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.” Because Jesus is the Lord and is the Son of God, the most important thing that you can do is listen and obey Him.

Third, you can be sure that God's Word is true and it's eternal. Psalm 119:89 proclaims, “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed (or settled) in the heavens.” God's Word doesn't change with the generations; it remains the same. It was true when it was written and it's still true today. When Jesus told the devil, “It is written,” in Luke 4, He was making it clear that what God had Moses write some 1200-1500 years before was still true and authoritative. One might translate the phrase, “it is written” as “it stands written.” God wrote it, and nothing can weaken its authority. It stands because God meant for it to stand. You can deny it, avoid it, hide it, or debate it; you can even get everyone to agree with you against the Word; but at the end of the day God's revealed Word stands as the spiritual and moral authority in our lives. God's Word stands because God stands! God's Word is the inspired Word, the authoritative Word, and it's the last Word.

The Lord Jesus promised in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” God's book, God's only book, the Bible, will survive when everything else is gone.

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

The Lord Jesus said, “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48). We will be judged by every word the Lord Jesus speaks. You can't ignore the Words of Jesus forever. They'll be brought forward as the standard of what is right and true and moral. You'll be judged by them, not by opinion polls or the ideas of the day. You can be sure God's Word will be present on the last day, the Day of Judgment.

Fourth, you can be sure of the love of God for His people. God's love is undeserved; it's intentional; and it's sacrificial. God loves us even when we don't deserve to be loved, and His grace is greater than our sins. God's love is intentional. Jesus laid down His life on His own initiative. God isn't obligated to us; we're obligated to Him. He intentionally chose to love and bless us. God's love is sacrificial. He so loved us that He was willing to sacrifice His only begotten Son Jesus, and Jesus bore our sins in his body; it was personal, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Peter 2:24). According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The love of God is far greater than I can understand or even describe. There's never been a moment or a fraction of a moment when God has not loved His people. Romans 8:35-39 asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we're being killed all the daylong; we're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Fifth, you can be sure that Jesus is coming again. The Bible tells us in Acts 1:10-11 that Jesus ascended to heaven. While the disciples were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." They made it clear: Jesus is coming a second time; and one day we will meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

When Jesus comes, He will raise all the dead and will judge mankind. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).

Each one of us must one day give an account to Jesus Christ, for the lives that we've led. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds done in the body, according to what he's done, whether good or bad." Those who have rejected Jesus and lived ungodly lives have reason to fear His coming, but those who have believed in Him and obeyed Him can look forward to His coming with joy and promise.

God keeps His promises. The Lord Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again and I'll take you to myself, that where I am there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). We can put our trust in God; we can put our trust in His Word; it means living lives that are worthy of His promises; it means living for Him and doing His will. Would you do that? Truth is still true and authoritative regardless of what people think or say. You can try to hide it, ignore it, deny it, rationalize it away, forget it, hate it, or argue against it; but the Truth remains firm and untouched. It stands the test of time and circumstance because God spoke it.

So the Bible urges in Proverbs 23:23, "Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding." Don't settle for anything less than the truth. Don't be deceived by a half-truth or by a counterfeit. God gave us the truth in Christ and the Bible, but we have to store it up in our hearts; we have to buy it. We have to then use the truth to judge between what is from God and what is not. We have to search out the truth to have confidence in what we believe and practice. John Huss said over 600 years ago, "Seek the truth, listen to the truth, teach the truth, love the truth, abide by the truth, and defend the truth unto death."

We must love and obey the truth if we hope to have eternal life. We must believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith, we can't please God. The truth means that we're honest about our sins. We know they're wrong and we must forsake our sins in repentance. The truth means that we'll confess Christ before others and be baptized for the remission of our sins. Jesus taught baptism is necessary to salvation in Mark 16:16 and John 3:5, and so we immerse penitent believers in water so that they might have their sins washed away and be united with Christ. Why not find reassurance by placing your faith in Christ and obeying His teaching. Nothing, nothing, nothing will bless your life more than knowing that you're right with God!