

Program Transcripts

For January 2019



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

January 2019

Topics subject to change without notice

JANUARY 6 – WHY LISTEN?

Few skills in life are more important than the skill of listening. To whom we listen and how we listen is critical to our soul's well-being. Listening to the Lord Jesus and His messages are the most important of all!

JANUARY 13 – WHY PARDON YOU?

God once asked the Israelites in Jeremiah 5:7, "Why should I pardon you?" Many think God is obligated to forgive us for any reason and never consider God is in control of whom He forgives. Why should God pardon you?

JANUARY 20 – WHY PRAY?

Does God really hear our prayers? Does God hear and answer everyone's prayer? When I pour out my heart to God, will it make any difference? Can I trust God when I need Him? Will He listen to me?

JANUARY 27 – BELIEVING JESUS

Do you believe that Jesus is truly the Christ, the Son of the living God? We ask this question when we baptize those who want to serve Christ, but faith is more than making a confession. We're exploring what it means to truly believe.

Why Listen?

Few skills in life are more important than the skill of listening. Today, we'll explore the reasons why we should listen to Jesus. When Jesus speaks, are you listening? The Lord Jesus has the Words of eternal life; you can find them in no other place. This is why it's so vital to study the Words of Jesus and His apostles found in the New Testament. We rejoice in sharing with you the teaching of our Lord and pray that it'll make a difference in your life.

Today, is a special day for me. Ten years ago, in 2009, I moved to Edmond, Oklahoma to be with Mack Lyon and begin speaking for In Search of the Lord's Way. These ten years have passed quickly. For a couple of years, brother Lyon and I shared the duties of the program. I have so many fond memories of Mack Lyon, who passed away in 2015 and whom I knew for 40 years. These have been exciting years, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. We've doubled the number of local broadcast stations since 2009 and moved to WGN America every Sunday. I've met many viewers in my travels and call them friends. Search can now be seen or heard throughout the US and in more than 30 other countries. Our website, searchtv.org and our YouTube channel, "SearchTVMinistry," reaches the world.

Thanks for making these ten years so blessed. Your prayers, kind words, and encouragement strengthens all of us who work together in this ministry. I'm grateful to my co-workers Chris Lyon, Jerry and Kerry Campbell, Craig Dodgen, Brian Berry, Donna Demas, and Colleen Hendrix, who labor with love and faith. We also rejoice in dozens of volunteers from the Edmond church and surrounding congregations who bless this ministry.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to Matthew. In this passage, God reveals the special place that the Lord Jesus Christ has. Let's read from Matthew 17:1-5.

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

Recently I was visiting with my friend, Randy Duke, an elder and the publisher of the Gospel Advocate. He asked me a thought-provoking question that every Bible teacher ought to ask himself. He said, "Why should I listen to you?" To be honest, I'm far more concerned with people listening to Jesus Christ and the words of the New Testament than in listening to me. I'm fallible, but God's Word isn't fallible. I'm ignorant about many things, but the Word of God gives us all the spiritual truth that's necessary for life and godliness. I won't hesitate to ask people to listen to Christ and the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures are God's Word, we must listen.

As the various biblical books of the New Testament became available, God wanted His people to hear and obey what these books said. Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16). His letter was not just for that one church, but for all the churches. He was insistent that the church in

Thessalonica also read and obey. He said, "I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers" (1 Thessalonians 5:27). Paul regarded what he said under inspiration as that important! The book of Revelation, written to the seven churches of Asia, opens with a blessing: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (Revelation 1:3).

It's no surprise that Paul urges the young preacher Timothy to read the Scripture aloud. Paul said, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13). The church, in the first century, slowly collected the various inspired writings of the apostles and the prophets. They treasured them and spent many hours listening to a speaker read the words of the inspired books of the New Testament. Early Christians listened, paying close attention to the truth they heard. They were the words of Jesus and His apostles, the words of life. Few skills are more necessary and vital to our knowledge of God than the skill of listening. No matter what role you have in life, you must learn to listen and listen well. The teachers of our youngest children emphasize the need to listen and follow directions, and we never outgrow that need.

Stephen Covey in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, suggests that there are five levels of listening. First, we may be ignoring another person, not really listening at all. Second, we may be pretending to listen. Third, we may be practicing selective listening, drifting in and out of the conversation and paying attention to only parts of what the other person is saying. Fourth, we may be listening attentively. But very few of us practice the fifth level, the highest form of listening—empathic listening, listening with intent to understand, to get inside the other person's frame of reference, seeking to understand them emotionally as well as intellectually.

When you're reading or listening to the Bible, seek to understand. Occasionally people tell me that I had said something, but what I actually said and what they heard were two different things. They sometimes missed important points or assumed that I said something that I didn't say. It's helpful to read the Word of God a second time or a third time. Read it in context. Ask who wrote it, to whom was he speaking, when was it written, and what circumstances surrounded the writing.

I had my hearing tested twice a few months ago and found that I wasn't hearing certain consonants correctly. The word that the tester said and the word that I thought I was repeating weren't the same word. This is a common problem for those with moderate hearing loss. This is what makes having an open Bible while we listen so valuable.

Humans make mistakes, but God's Word is without error. If there is misunderstanding of Scripture, it comes not from what God said but from how we grasp what He said. We all have communication challenges. We can filter out what we don't want to hear. Some pay attention to the Scriptures that they like, but ignore the ones they don't like. Others pick pet Scriptures and focus only on them. They hear only some of the truth. When they hear someone teach the rest of what God says, they assume the teacher is wrong. Solomon said, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13). If we only get half the message, we'll miss part of what God wants us to know. Proverbs 15:31-32 says, "The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. And whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence."

Something can be true, but not be the whole truth. We're saved by grace, but it's a grace

that's with conditions, not grace alone. We're saved by faith but it's not by faith alone. It does little good to hear only what we want to hear and to ignore all the rest. We haven't really heard God if we do that. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil." When people start reasoning before they hear the whole truth, they usually end up in error. Proverbs 19:27 says, "Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge."

People like to justify themselves and their moral choices. They sometimes reason that some passage that they don't like doesn't apply to them, so they can do as they please. Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." When people stop listening to God, they hurt themselves and others. Proverbs 19:20 says, "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future."

Some choose to listen to the wrong people. Some folks listen to people who don't know the Lord but take pleasure in evil. Proverbs 17:4 says, "An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue." If you get your counsel from a wicked source, don't be surprised that you will act wickedly. Proverbs 29:12 says, "If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked." If you get your counsel from a source that doesn't respect God, don't be surprised when you violate the will of God. God has spoken to guide us in the right way, the true and pure way. When you get your counsel from people who do not know God, you'll miss out on the wisdom of God.

Jack Lewis, one of my professors, used to advise us to use discretion when we're reading books about the Bible and theology. He said, "Eat the fish, and throw the bones away." Just because you hear something on television or read it on the internet doesn't mean it's true! If you listen to the babble of the world and those who scoff against God, you'll lose sight of the truth and end up in error. Paul warned Timothy, "But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:16-18). Some false teachers who reasoned that the resurrection was past, began spreading that lie, and upset the faith of some. Sadly, some people are spreading that same lie today.

When you want the truth about any spiritual matter, go to the Scriptures. Seek your advice from Jesus and His apostles. Let them teach you, reprove you, correct you, and train you in righteousness. The Scriptures are more precious than gold, yes, than much fine gold. If you fail to listen to the Scriptures, you'll rob yourself of the most precious treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Proverbs 25:12 says, "Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprove to a listening ear."

Let the Scriptures build your faith. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Let the Scriptures build your hope. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Let the Scriptures renew your love for God. The more we listen to God, the more we'll love Him. The psalmist said, "I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love. And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes" (Psalm 119:47-48). No matter who you are or what your role in life is, learning to

listen well is a skill that you must master if you wish to serve God and people.

Many people find time to listen to everything and everyone except the Lord Jesus Christ. We all have busy lives, but I wonder if we're spending our time on things that really matter. We waste so much time on frivolous and earthly things, forgetting the heavenly and eternal things. We seek to gain every advantage on earth and forget we have a soul. On Judgment Day, the Lord Jesus won't ask how much money you saved or what kind of car you owned. He won't ask if your team won or what was your favorite television show. He'll ask about your attitudes, your words, and your actions. I fear we're so concerned with the cosmetics of the outside that we miss the need to purify the heart and the spirit, preparing to live with God.

Luke 10:38-42 tells the story of two sisters who loved God but focused on different things: "Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'" Martha was anxious and troubled about many things, while Mary focused on listening to Jesus Christ. Are you listening to Jesus? Have you focused on what affects your eternal destiny?

The psalmist appealed to God, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18). Shouldn't we long to hear what the Lord Jesus says? That's why all we've said today matters. The Lord Jesus has the answers to your spiritual questions, the guidance you require, and the hope you need to live eternally. Don't miss the promises of the gospel. Don't spend eternity wishing you had listened to and learned from Jesus.

James 1:22-25 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves...But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." Listening to God is essential to eternal life, but you must do more than listen. You must apply what you've heard to your heart, to your thinking, and to your life. Commit yourself to paying close attention in order to understand what God says and do it.

Jesus once asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). When people don't act on what they hear, it's as if they never heard! Failing to obey the Lord is as dangerous as ignoring the Lord altogether. If we do as God says and truly "Listen to Him," we'll never ignore what He says. We'll take His words to heart and obey!

If you've heard what the Lord says, trust Him! Love Him! Come to Him! Obey Him! Do what He says without disputing with Him or trying to change His words. Believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Make Him your Lord by repenting of your sins. Tell everyone of your faith by confessing Him. Be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're buried and raised with Christ through faith in the working of God, God gives you new life and forgives all your transgressions (Colossians 2:12-13). He makes you His child when you're baptized (Galatians 3:26-27).

It may be that you were once faithful to the Lord, but you've wandered away from the Lord and the church. Why not start listening once again? Come back to God, repent of your negligence, and ask God to forgive you. You'll never regret doing the right thing and being right with God. Take Christ and His Words to heart once again.

Why Pardon You?

God once asked the Israelites, "Why should I pardon you?" (Jeremiah 5:7). Today, we're exploring the wonders of the grace of God. We live by the grace of God. James 1:17 says, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Your life, air, food, water, clothing, shelter, and every spiritual blessing come from our Father in heaven. In Christ, we have faith, hope, and love. God gives us joy, peace, and salvation through Christ. In the future, we have an inheritance in heaven because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Because of the grace of God, in Christ, we are most blessed.

John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, said many years ago, "I am not what I ought to be — ah, how imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be — I abhor what is evil, and I would cleave to what is good! I am not what I hope to be — soon, soon shall I put off mortality, and with mortality all sin and imperfection. Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was, a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'"

God loves us more than we can measure, and has provided through the death of Christ and the message of the gospel our rescue from sin and its consequences. All this comes by grace as the gift of God; but this grace demands that we lovingly receive and trust Him, turn our lives around, and obey Him.

Our reading today comes from Titus 2:11-14. Paul is talking to Titus about the changes that take place in our lives when the grace of God works.

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.

Yes, we need to be zealous for good deeds and leave the old way of life.

All we are and all we possess come from God. We're able to enjoy eternal life because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins. Some people have the mistaken notion that God owes them eternal life and must answer every prayer, whether they are devoted to Him or not. They think God should let them into heaven, whether they have paid any attention to Him or not. We go to a funeral, and sometimes the minister will make a saint out of a rascal, who had no intention of serving God. Does God think like that?

God has no desire for anyone to be lost. He went to great lengths so that we might be saved. Sometimes we forget the most basic teaching of God. John 3:16-18 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." God doesn't want to condemn anyone, but some people refuse to believe and obey the Lord. Sadly, some Christians never quite deny

themselves or take up their crosses to follow Jesus.

I fear we think too lightly of God's grace and tend to excuse ourselves from the consequences of sin. Have you considered how terrible sin really is? Ephesians 2:1-3 says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." To be a "child of wrath" means that God will one day punish you for the way that you have lived. This is sad, but Ephesians doesn't stop here.

Ephesians 2:4-7 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 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 knew that we needed to be saved, and He was willing to pardon and save us so that we could live with Him eternally. But God wants more than merely to save us; He wants to transform our lives to be what He created us to be.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, (you can't earn it) so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Our salvation is a gift. We can't boast about saving ourselves, because no one can save himself. God must save us by grace through faith. We're saved in order to be different than we were before.

Paul explains with a before and after picture of this change that grace works in our lives; and so we change morally, and spiritually, and practically. Let's think about Titus 2:11-14 again, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all (people) 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 (why?) to redeem us from every lawless deed, (get us away from those things) and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, (that we are) zealous for good deeds." We deny the worldly and the ungodly so that we can live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

An ungodly person never gives God a second thought; he's selfish and lawless. A godly person, on the other hand, realizes who God is and seeks to serve Him. He recognizes what Jesus did for him on the cross and knows that he belongs to Jesus Christ. He wants to live pure from sin and is zealous to do what is right, to serve the Lord, and to do good to others. He is truly born again, living a new life that's different from the one he used to live. That's why God wants to pardon us, so that He can transform our lives.

Someone objects that he doesn't want God telling him what to do or how to live his life. God has given you freewill to make up your mind whether you'll live by your own ways outside of His laws, or whether you will serve Him. What you choose, friend, will determine your destiny in the hereafter.

Paul wrote to some Jewish Christians who judged the Gentile Christians for not keeping the Law, "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice

such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:3-11). Attitude matters, and where we place our priorities matters. Whether we listen to God and obey His teaching makes a difference in our salvation. If you choose to disbelieve and disobey, you can hardly blame God for rejecting you at the end of time.

Give yourself to the Lord Jesus, and Jesus will care for you from that day forward. We're fallible creatures who sin and need the help of the Lord Jesus. When we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7) Walking in the light is not sinless perfection. No one can live a perfectly sinless life except Jesus. Even when we walk in the light, we need the blood of Jesus and His help. As our high priest, Hebrews 9:24 says that He has entered heaven in the presence of God for us. What is He doing there? The Lord Jesus has three roles in heaven; His work is with the Father on behalf of Christians.

First, He is our mediator. First Timothy 2:3-6 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. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” Jesus is doing what no one else can do; He alone is mediating for us with the Father. A mediator stands between God and us and reconciles us with the Father, so that we can be right with God.

Second, He is interceding for us. Hebrews 7:24-25 says, “Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Jesus earnestly pleads our case, formally making requests to the Father on our behalf. Perhaps you remember how Peter boasted about never falling away or denying the Lord, but Peter was weak. He denied the Lord three times. I mention this to point to how Jesus deals with weak Christians when they sin. Jesus said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked permission to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you” (Luke 22:31). I find great comfort in knowing that Jesus not only prayed for Peter; He is also praying for me in my weaknesses. That humbles me and makes me want to love the Lord even more.

Third, the Lord Jesus is our advocate. He stands by our side pleading our case with the Father. First John 2:1-2 says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” The word “propitiation” refers to an atoning sacrifice. Jesus

gave His body and His blood on the cross to atone for our sins so we could be reconciled to God. We couldn't be friends with God or even approach God were it not for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. Consider this: the very person who was the atoning sacrifice is the very person who is pleading your case and advocating for you with the Father.

Romans 8:32 speaks of the Father's great love and kindness toward 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?" If God would not withhold His Son from us, we can be sure that He will not withhold anything that will bless us, but will freely give us all things that will lead to our salvation and living the Christian life. That's what the Lord is doing for us in heaven. What a marvelous God and a great salvation we have in Christ.

God's grace cost the body and blood of His Son, Jesus. For this reason, we must never presume upon the grace of God. God doesn't owe us grace; it's His gift. Gifts are free, but they aren't cheap. Hebrews 10:26-31 says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. And anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Perhaps we should all examine ourselves and consider God's question, "Why should I pardon you?"

When we look at our past, we see things that we wish we hadn't done. Have we repented or have we continued with our foolish ways? Titus 3:3-4 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." Before we knew Christ, we lived in a sad state; but we don't have to continue living foolishly, causing all kinds of problems for ourselves and the people we love.

Titus 3:5-7 says, "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."

We are dependent upon the grace of God for our salvation. We cannot earn it; but God does expect us to meet His conditions in order to receive His grace. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." The Lord Jesus said, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33 that if we confess Him before men, He will confess us. None of these things earn salvation, but you can't be saved without them. Titus said that God saves us through the washing of regeneration. That's baptism! That's the time that God causes us to be born again and God washes away our sins (Acts 22:16). God wants to pardon you. Will you let Him? Will you meet His conditions? Do it today!

Why Pray?

Most of us grew up hearing prayers at church or before we eat. Today, we're exploring the difference that prayer makes. God's Word teaches us the values that we most need. The Bible is God speaking to us today, and prayer is when we tell God all that is in our hearts. As our Father in heaven, God wants to teach us through His Word the most important lessons, but He also wants to hear from us. God cares for us and wants to hear what we have to say.

In a crisis, we pray more fervently than usual. We want God to hear our plea. Does prayer really work? Does God really hear what I have to say? Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day." Perhaps you too are driven to your knees. You call upon God to help you through your struggle. Will prayer matter at all?

I've heard people speak of praying for something and not getting what they asked for. They assumed God was supposed to do whatever they wanted. God, however, is a good parent and doesn't give His children everything they ask for. He gives them what they need and what will bless them spiritually and physically. Romans 8:32 assures us that, "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?" We can trust God to do what is best and to meet our needs. How is your prayer life? Does God know your heart?

Our reading today comes from James 4:1-3. James is dealing with some people who were quarrelling and fussing and couldn't get an answer to their prayers, and he's telling them why.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Let's pray together. O, Father we're grateful for Your love and for Your grace. Help us to love others and not be so selfish with our prayers and with the things that we desire. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

When you can do nothing else, you can pray! Prayer is God's gift. In hearing our prayers, God is giving Himself, His ear, His heart, and His love to pay attention to us! God gives us His close attention when we pray. Ask, seek, and knock! He will answer, help you find, and open the door at any time.

First, prayer will bring you into the presence of God! Prayer is communicating with God. In prayer, we open our hearts and our souls up to God. In Exodus 3:2-5, Moses saw a burning bush. The Scripture says, "When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'" Prayer is like that experience—we come into God's presence.

God also said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:6) We don't have to be afraid like Moses was because we're praying to our Father in heaven, who loves us. In our prayers, let's be reverent to God because He is holy.

The Hebrew writer describes the Lord, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence (boldness) to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16). We should pray with reverence, but with confidence, approaching our Father and God who is to be honored but who is also one that understands us and is willing to give us mercy and grace to help us in the time of need. God is God, but He is compassionate toward us.

Second, prayer will unleash the power of God. Prayer is God’s idea. He wants us to pray. The Lord Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or if he shall ask 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 shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:7-8). God is a good Father who loves us and wants to bless our lives and meet our needs.

I believe in the power of prayer because I believe in the power of God to answer my prayers. Prayer works because God works. Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which is outside the will of God. Prayer doesn’t need proof; it needs practice. James said, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:16-18).

James challenges us to believe God when we pray. James 1:5-8 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom [this is daily wisdom, not revelation], let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” God will bless us if we will have faith in Him and believe that He can help us to find the answers that we seek. God does not always answer prayers the ways that we want Him to, but God answers prayers the way that is best for us. We don’t always know what is best for ourselves.

Sometimes God says yes to our prayers. He did so for Elijah, a man like us, and God may bless our lives as well. God wants and expects His children to keep on asking until we receive. “Jesus a parable to the effect that one ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’” (Luke 18:1-8). There are times when what we need most is to believe that God will hear us and answer our prayers.

Sometimes God says no to our prayers. A negative answer may be the answer of a loving God. No parent would give his four-year-old son a brand new car. God didn't remove Paul's thorn in the flesh, even though he asked him to do so three times! Paul learned some things from this experience. Paul said, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. And therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Christians should pray, "God's will be done," and respect the wisdom of a loving God.

Sometimes God says, "Wait a while." Though Israel suffered much in Egyptian slavery and cried out to God, God didn't answer their prayers until Moses was eighty years old (Exodus chapters 1 to 3). Jesus also responded slowly to Mary and Martha when they asked that Jesus come and heal Lazarus. Jesus didn't heal Lazarus quickly. In fact, He didn't heal him at all from the illness; He, instead, raised him from the dead. By waiting, Jesus did a greater work than if he had merely healed His friend. It's not easy to be patient. Just because something doesn't happen as quickly as we wish doesn't mean God isn't at work. Psalm 147:11 says, "The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness." Don't give up on God; He may be doing more than you know to answer your prayer.

Sometimes God gives us something different from what we ask. The thief on the cross only wanted to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom, but Jesus said to him that he would be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:43). We don't always know what is best for ourselves, or how we should pray (Romans 8:26). But, we can be assured that our loving Father will do what is best. God will give us the things that we need even when we cannot see our own needs. God sees what we cannot see and He knows what we don't. Let's trust His wisdom to help us through our struggles.

God often does more than we ask or think. Paul had great faith in God's ability to answer prayer. In his letter to the Ephesians, he said, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21). You and I have limits, but God isn't limited. We serve a great God who is able—we must remember that.

God gave Solomon the opportunity to pray for anything he wished. Solomon prayed, "So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9). Verse 10 says, "It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this." God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you." Verse 13 continues, "I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

God blessed Solomon beyond his expectations. Thankfully, God has blessed us, too. Who knows how many blessings we have received from His hands? He's likely been far kinder to

us than we realize. Jesus said that our heavenly Father knows our needs even before we ask. He knows our physical needs of food, clothing, and shelter. He knows our emotional needs of love and respect. He knows of our spiritual needs of instruction, encouragement, and even correction. When children of God come to Him humbly, and sincerely, and fervently, He will bless them richly.

It is in prayer that we realize how much we need our Father in heaven. It's a great day when a person realizes that however wise and strong he thinks he is, he still needs a Father in heaven to help him and to bless him. Many Christians fail to pray. They fail to take their sorrow, heartaches, and worries to the only One who can help them—and that's God! Paul said, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

In ancient Persia, King Darius signed a law making it a crime punishable by death to pray to anyone but to himself. The prophet Daniel, though a high official in Persia, refused to obey the edict. He prayed openly to the one true God. Daniel 6:10 says: "Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." The king had no choice; he regrettably cast Daniel into the lions' den for the night. God kept Daniel safe from the lions. Daniel was willing to die rather than give up praying to the God of heaven.

My friend, I hope you won't stop praying; keep on talking to God. Keep on asking God for what you need. Keep on asking him to deliver you from the evil one. Keep on praying His will be done. Keep on depending on God for comfort, for forgiveness, and for help. God answers prayer.

Let's pray. O, Father, we're thankful that You hear our hearts, and You know our minds, and that You care, and that You give what is best for us. Father, be with us and help us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). We must conform to His will in our thinking, our behavior, and our prayers. When we live and ask according to His will He will readily grant our requests.

To live according to His will, we must know Him and His Word. Some fail in prayer because sin lives in their hearts. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." People need forgiveness to have a close relationship with God. If you're not a Christian, believe in Jesus, love and trust Him, repent of your sins, confess His name, and be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of your sins.

I believe strongly in prayer, but prayer won't make up for failing to become a Christian or for failing to repent. Make sure you're right with God. There's a time to pray, yes, but there's also a time to act. Act today. Don't waste your life, your soul, or your eternity by putting off doing the will of God. God wants to forgive you and give you eternal life; but God won't twist your arm. He wants you to love Him enough to come to Him and to obey Him. And when you obey the gospel in faith, repentance, and baptism, the grace of God washes you clean and causes you to be born again as a child of God. Please act today, so that you may enjoy the wonderful blessing of a relationship with God. God hears His faithful children's prayers. Are you a faithful child of God?

Believing Jesus

Do you believe that Jesus is truly the Christ, the Son of the living God? Today, we're exploring what it means to believe, truly believe, in Jesus Christ. We believe God, so we believe what He says in His Word, the Bible. God has shown us the way to eternal life in Scripture. We've learned that God will keep every promise, but we also realize that God makes a distinction between those who will obey Him and those who won't. So, we study the Scriptures and strive to follow the Lord. If you wish to be right with the living God, faith is a necessity. You probably recall the verses that we all heard in Bible classes from our childhood. The Lord Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only (some versions say only begotten) Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But do you recall the next two verses, verses 17 and 18? The Lord also said, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God is necessary if we are to have eternal life. It's not just believing God exists; it's also believing in Jesus as God's only Son, that is, His only begotten Son. We must put our faith in Christ. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). The way to God is through faith in Jesus. We must put our faith in Him.

Our reading today comes from the Letter to the Hebrews 11:1-6 where the author defines, illustrates, and then talks about the importance of what it means to believe.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Today, we're going to look at faith from God's perspective. Many look at God and Christianity through the eyes of popular culture. Salvation isn't an entitlement that God owes us. It's a gift to those who believe. We should believe what God teaches and not read into our faith what we think it should mean. Let's listen to God, asking what kind of faith God wants from us. We seek to please God.

Throughout the Bible, God distinguishes those who please Him and abide in His grace from those who don't. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." We must believe in God, but we must also know about the God that we believe. We must know that He only rewards those who seek Him. Many people believe a God exists, but the God they seek is not the God of the Bible.

Our postmodern society thinks it should design its own god and tell its god what to believe rather than hear the God who created them. Some manufacture a god that fits the times. Faith

in a culturally-correct god is not the same as faith in a holy God who made the world and will one day judge us according to His Word. We must believe in God as He reveals and defines Himself in His Word, not in the naïve and non-judgmental god that's popularized by our culture.

Our culture thinks of God as one who winks at sin, who never condemns anyone, and who believes everything that we believe. Many think the God of all grace doesn't care about righteousness or truth. Others have forgotten that God is not just holy, but utterly holy. Habakkuk 1:13 says of God, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor." Some think God doesn't care what we believe or do, but God is vitally interested in our living holy lives devoted to the truth, serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

We cannot speak of having faith in Jesus Christ, but then believing anything that we want. Nor can we speak of having faith in Jesus Christ and living any way we want. When a person comes to Christ as a believer, He belongs to Jesus. Paul told the Christians at Corinth, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If we wear the name Christian and believe in Jesus Christ, we can never forget that. We are not our own; we belong to Jesus. He is our Lord and Master, and we are His servants.

Moses wrote, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:2). The eternal God stands above our changing culture. The Lord is not subject to the changing whims of humanity. His holiness, His righteousness, His purity, and His justice do not change with popular opinions. We must accept Him and His revealed will as He gave it to us instead of trying to remake Him in our own image. Faith in God doesn't mean that we can believe whatever we please. How can anyone say that He trusts in God when he doesn't believe what God says? Faith means we believe what the Lord teaches. Why? Because He is Divine and we're not. He knows all things and has all authority and we do not. He gives us His wisdom in the Bible, because He loves us and wants us to know the truth.

Believing in the God of the Bible also necessitates trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. The Old Testament prophesies of Jesus as the coming Messiah. The New Testament tells how He fulfilled dozens of prophecies. Believing in Jesus means you believe the claims that He made to be God's Son. Jesus said that He would rise from the dead, and He did! Jesus said Jerusalem would fall, and the Romans destroyed the city in 70 A.D!

The Bible says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). Many people approach Christ with preconceived notions. If Jesus fails to measure up to what they want or what they imagined, they're not willing to believe. Some will only believe if Jesus never judges anyone or never calls for moral change. That kind of Jesus doesn't exist. To know the real Jesus, we must read all that the New Testament says about Him, not just pick out certain passages and then ignore the rest.

The Lord Jesus doesn't play games. He came to His own people but they didn't receive Him. The Lord Jesus blesses only those who believe in His name, who believe that He is the Christ, and who believe what He teaches. Jesus loves you, but He's not obligated to save you unconditionally. Jesus isn't your servant; He's your creator and Lord.

Faith stands between being accepted and being rejected. God made that decision, and we can't overrule God. The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but

whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18). On another occasion, Jesus taught the Jews that He had come from the Father in Heaven. He said, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Believing in Jesus means believing that He truly is the Christ, the Son of God. It means believing that He is the fulfillment of God’s prophecies of the Messiah.

Saving faith isn’t simply believing in the act of believing; it’s believing in the Person. Believing in the Person Jesus means that you believe that what He claims, says, and promises is true. If I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then I’ll recognize His authority over my whole life. Faith includes duties and responsibilities. The Lord Jesus said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). If I regard Jesus as Lord, I cannot pick and choose which of His commandments I will obey and which I won’t.

There are times when we wonder why God asks the things that He asks. But trusting faith means we act even when we don’t understand. Hebrews 11:8 says, “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham didn’t argue with God. Because he trusted God, he simply obeyed. He showed his confidence in God, though he didn’t know what would happen. We trust God in things we don’t know because we find Him trustworthy in what we do know. We know God is true and loving.

The apostle Paul said, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). Paul could face the future with peace and confidence because He knew God and how God kept His promises. We can trust God in what we don’t know because God has proved Himself worthy of our trust in what we do know!

Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” By faith, we can understand that God created this world in six days just as He said in Genesis, chapter one. While no one was around to witness the creation, we can trust God’s Word about the creation. Why? Because we know God is trustworthy, and worthy of our faith.

The early disciples were willing to die for their faith for two reasons. First, they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days” (Acts 1:3). They saw Him, heard Him speak, and touched His body. They were so convinced that when they were threatened by the Jewish council they replied, “we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Second, they believed in Jesus because they saw how He fulfilled the many Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. If you’d grown up as a Jew in the first century, your Bible studies at the synagogue would constantly include prophecies about the coming Messiah. Jesus was born in the right place, Bethlehem; at the right time; during that forth kingdom; in the right tribe, the tribe Judah; with the right family lineage; and with the right kind of mother—a virgin. A star announced His birth, and wise men came from the East looking for Him. The apostle Philip said to his brother, Nathaniel, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). As you read the book of Acts, the apostles and evangelists repeatedly preached that Jesus was

indeed the promised Messiah.

What we know is true about Jesus is that He is the promised Messiah who arose from the dead. For this reason, we call Him "Lord" and "Christ." Since we have confidence that He is the Son of God, we can trust what He says about creation, about Adam and Eve, about the flood, about Sodom and Gomorrah, and every other story found in the Old Testament. When Jesus spoke of the Old Testament, He treated what He read there as true, historical events. For this reason, we can believe the Old Testament is trustworthy and true. We trust Jesus Christ!

Because we have a living Savior, we want a living faith and not a dead one. James 2:14-18 says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works;' show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." Dead, inactive faith is useless. It doesn't reveal that one truly believes in Jesus Christ. It doesn't save.

Saving faith is always obedient. The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36). You can claim to believe, but unless your faith leads to obedience, you cannot be right with God. When the Bible speaks of saving faith, it is always an active, obedient faith. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." James said, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Are you a doer of the Word or merely a hearer?

After Lazarus died, Jesus visited his sisters Mary and Martha. In John 11:23-27, the Scripture reveals a conversation between Jesus and Martha. Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

We need to ask ourselves, "Do you believe this?" Do you believe God created the world in six days? Do you believe the Bible is true? Do you believe Jesus arose from the dead and is Lord? Do you believe Jesus' death on the cross can atone for your sins? Do you believe that you will one day be raised from the dead? Do you believe in the Judgment Day? Do you believe in Heaven and Hell? Faith in Christ means believing what He taught and what He did to give us eternal life.

If you really believe, put your faith into action by repenting of your sins; confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God; and by being baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water of a penitent believer. It's done in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Baptism is the time when you become a child of God, free from sin, and added to the Lord's church, and that's all of God's doing. The Lord Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). We hope you'll become a Christian, today.