

Program Transcripts

For February 2019



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

February 2019

Topics subject to change without notice

FEBRUARY 3 – RESPONDING TO JESUS

Jesus Christ sacrificed His life for our sakes. Have you considered how we should to Christ for all He has done? We cannot ignore what Jesus did. Isn't it much better to take the cross seriously, to love, and to serve Him?

FEBRUARY 10 – READ THE BIBLE

Have you read your Bible lately? Many people think they know God's ways but haven't read the Bible closely. Hearing bits and pieces in sermons is not enough to get everything you need from Scripture. Read it closely and carefully.

FEBRUARY 17 – THE LORD'S SUPPER

Each Lord's day, God's family gathers to remember and proclaim the death of our Lord Jesus by partaking of the Lord's Supper. We will look at the Lord's Supper and explain why we partake of it each week.

FEBRUARY 24 – FASTING

While the New Testament never commands Christians to fast, it is clear they did fast at times when they were pressed or when they were preparing to do something important. What is fasting and how is it valuable.

Responding to Jesus

Jesus Christ sacrificed His life for our sakes. Have you considered how we should respond to Christ for all that He's done? The Scriptures are God's great gift to our learning. Through God's Word, we come to believe; we have hope; we learn what love is; and we grow as people. Although the Bible is simple enough for children to learn some truths, one can search the Bible for a lifetime and will continue to find treasures of wisdom. Romans 11:33 exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

I became a Christian because I love Jesus. His love, His power, His teaching, His wisdom, His honesty, and His compassion won my heart. I became a Christian because of the grace of God found in the sacrifice of Christ. The cross draws us to Christ. John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." No one ever loved me so that He gave Himself for my sins, but Jesus. I wanted to be like Christ. I wanted to go to heaven and live with God forever.

When I became a Christian, I knew God would expect me to be like Christ. Christianity isn't a religion of grace that expects nothing of us. Christ bore a cross to not only save us and deliver us from the evil in this world, but also to give us a cross to bear. That cross means that we die to ourselves so that we can live for Christ. That cross means that we cease from sin and start doing what is right and good. That cross means "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Our reading today comes from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians 5:6-10. In this passage, he talks about how we look at faith and how we deal with God because one day we'll face Him.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Some believe in what you might call "designer Christianity." They think they can make up their own blend of religion, and God is content with that. Some think God ought to be happy with anything they offer to Him in the way of service or worship. It's almost as if God was in our debt and was happy with any scraps we serve Him. Many people seem to forget that God created us and sustains us; we didn't create Him. They forget that we're dependent upon God, but He isn't dependent upon us.

Some forget that Jesus died for our sins to rescue us from its consequences. He saved us, when we didn't deserve it. Sometimes you think about being saved. Christianity isn't something that we make up as we go; it's something that has been revealed to us. It's a revealed faith from God that we should follow. People forget that we're accountable to God, that we owe our soul's salvation to Him. That our soul is worth more than the whole world. Let's get serious about our faith.

Considering the death of Jesus on the cross for us, how should I respond to Jesus?

First, I respond to Jesus with my love. After Peter denied Jesus three times on that night He was betrayed, Jesus confronted Peter. The Bible records their conversation in John 21:15-17: "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?'" (speaking about the fish and other things). He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" Loving is so important, but we have to learn how to love.

The Bible teaches us how we're supposed to show love for Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Later, in verses 23 to 24 Jesus said to Judas (that is, not Iscariot), "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words." We can't claim to love the Lord and not even know what His commandments are, not know Him at all. We can't claim to love the Lord and then rebel against the things that Jesus teaches. We can't claim to love the Lord and make fun of the will of God or act like the Lord doesn't know what He's talking about. How we love the Lord is by listening to His Word and obeying it.

If we love the Lord, we'll draw close to Him and worship Him. We can't claim to love the Lord if we never take the time to worship Him. God said, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). How will you convince the Lord of your love for Him if you willfully abandon the church? You might convince yourself that you're a pretty good guy, but how does God see this matter? You might be pleased with yourself, but is God? You cannot love God on your own terms and never consider what God wants or desires. What kind of love is that?

Christ wants to know that we love Him, and one of the ways that we show that love is by our worship. Our worship must be real and come from our hearts. God knows our hearts. Some people go to religious concerts and think they have worshiped because they heard someone else sing. No matter how uplifting that is to you, God is seeking something more from you. He wants your heart, your lips, and your life, not as a spectator, but as a participant. The Lord Jesus said, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Loving worship comes from my spirit, genuinely from my heart, and given to the God of heaven.

There's one more thing. If I love Jesus, I'm going to talk about Jesus. I can't imagine living my life without talking about the person who saved me from my sins, and has given me help every day, and a home in heaven. The apostle Paul said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am 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). As Christians, we have an obligation to take the gospel to the whole world, to tell everyone of the love and grace of God and how it is available freely to them. That's why we have this television program, to tell people about Jesus and His love.

Second, I respond to Jesus with my loyalty. Since I belong to Him, I ought to wear His name and never be ashamed that He is my Lord. The Bible tells us, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). As members of the church, we're the bride of Christ, and we ought to wear His name. I don't understand people who separate the name of Christ from the church. I'm blessed to wear the name of "Christian" and to be a member of the church that belongs to Christ. Jesus built the church, purchased it with his own blood, serves as the head of the church, and is the Savior of the church. Why wouldn't the church want to wear his name? Why wouldn't a Christian want to be known as a Christian in every respect, in every aspect of his life?

The Lord Jesus said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Some folks are ashamed to admit that they're Christians or that they go to church. They would rather stay silent than to be ridiculed for their faith. What kind of loyalty is that? The apostle Paul, who died for his faith, said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). That is loyalty to Jesus Christ! We need that kind of loyalty! Jesus needs to live in our hearts and our lives. Yes, we need loyalty like that!

People can't live like the world lives and claim that they're loyal to Jesus. Our lives must show our faith. The Bible says, "Therefore be careful how you walk (that is, live), not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Unfortunately, some Christians live like they never heard of Jesus or ever read a Bible. Their mouths are so full of unwholesome words, and their actions show that they don't know Jesus Christ. First John 2:6 says, "the one who says he abides in Him (that is, in Christ) ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." If we're to be loyal to Christ, then let's live worthy of the name "Christian."

The Lord Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Some people live for the almighty dollar, and nothing else matters. If the dollar is your god, then Jesus won't be. What's true of money is true of anything. You cannot serve two masters faithfully. You will make a decision to follow one and reject the other. If you wear the name of Christ, then serve Him. Don't let anything come between you and the Lord. The apostle Paul said, "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him (that is, the Lord). For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). My friend, do you please the Lord Jesus Christ?

Third, we respond to Jesus with our obedience. Jesus is LORD, and we are His servants. Hebrews 5:8-9 explains, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." Obedience means that I will listen to Christ and do what He says. I'll obey even when it's difficult and even when others don't obey. Paul said, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). God gives us the desire and the ability to obey.

Fourth, we respond to Jesus by sacrifices. A chaplain was speaking to a soldier lying on a cot in a hospital. He said "You have lost an arm fighting for our nation," and the young soldier said "No," with a smile. "I didn't lose it; I gave it." In the same way, Jesus didn't lose His life. He gave it purposefully. First Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Jesus sacrificed His life to open the door for you to change. Second Corinthians 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). Romans 12:1 urges us, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." I belong to the Lord Jesus and I owe Him my heart, my worship, my gifts, and my service in His cause. Second Corinthians 9:7 says, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Do you love the Lord?

I heard a true story about a man who operated a drawbridge. At a certain time every afternoon, he raised the bridge for a ferryboat to go by, and then lowered it in time for a passenger train to cross over. He performed this task according to the clock. One day, he brought his son to work so he could watch the trains. As his father raised the bridge, the boy got excited and wanted to take a closer look. His father realized his son, to his horror, had come dangerously close to the bridge's gears. Frantic, he wanted to rescue the boy, but if he left the controls, he would not be back in time to lower the bridge for the approaching passenger train. If he lowered the bridge, his son would be killed. If he left it raised, hundreds of people would die. He knew what he had to do. With tears streaming down his face, he watched the passenger train roll by. On board, people chatted and read their newspapers. They were totally unaware of what had just happened. The man cried out, "Don't you realize I just gave my son for you?"

This story is a picture of what also happened at the Cross. God gave up His beloved Son so that we might live. Many people fail to give it a second thought. How about you? Are you conscious of the sacrifice that God made on your behalf? Will you thank Him? Will you commit your life to Him to serve Him? Put your faith in Jesus Christ and confess Him as the Son of God, repent of your sins, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Oh, do it today!

Read the Bible

Have you read your Bible lately? Many people think they know God's ways but haven't read the Bible closely. Today, we're looking at reasons to read the Bible. We seek the truth, and we know where to find it. It's where it's always been. God revealed the truth in Christ through the Scriptures. We can know God and know Christ by a close study of what God reveals about Himself in Scripture. God has spoken to us. He's not silent or hidden from us. Because of Scripture, we know how and why we exist; what God wills for our lives; and what the future holds after this life is over. We're blessed!

We read the Scriptures so that we may know God and Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, the Bible opens our hearts so that we might know Who created us, how He is holy and true, and how we are accountable to Him. When we do not know God, we suffer enslavement to sin and hopelessness. Paul reminded the Galatians, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods" (Galatians 4:8).

Psalm 19:7-11 says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." No other book can bless you more than the Bible, God's Words!

Our reading today comes from the Psalm 119:97-104. In this psalm, it's what the Word of God can do for you and your life, that is emphasized.

O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

From the time when God first proposed to Moses to write down His Words, God has always emphasized the need to read and to practice what He taught. When people have read, studied, and practiced God's written word, they were at their best and were considered blessed by God. If you read nine chapters per day, you can read the New Testament in a month. If you read ten chapters of the Old Testament per day, you can read it through in a little over three months.

The Lord Jesus read Scripture and preached in the synagogue. He took for granted the leaders and scribes knew what God had said in the Old Testament. More than once Jesus said to the Jews, "Have you never read in the Scriptures?" or "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26). Jesus himself referred to or quoted over 120 Scriptures in his messages found in the Gospels. He knew the Scriptures and expected everyone to know them.

God also expects us to read what stands written in the New Testament. Paul wrote, "I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers" (1 Thessalonians 5:27). He urged, "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). He instructed the young preacher Timothy, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13).

Paul recognized that what he wrote had the authority of the Lord behind it. He said, “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). After speaking about the role of women in the church, Paul made it clear that, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). If the Word of God stands by the Lord's authority, we should listen to it, study it, memorize it, love it, and practice it.

There are many reasons to read Scripture, and here are just a few. First, we read Scripture because we need to know right from wrong. What we truly believe influences how we live and what our morals are. Sadly, because many don't know God or His Word, they live lawless lives and cause much suffering. There's a profound difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and light and darkness. To know what is right, read your Bible!

Second, we read Scripture because faith comes from God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” John 20:30-31 says, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Third, we read the Bible because the Scriptures give us hope. Romans 15:4 says, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Where would we be were it not for the promises of God? Where would we be without the gospel, the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? If you want hope, read the Bible!

Fourth, we read the Scriptures because the Bible teaches us to love. First John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” There is no better example of love than that of Jesus Christ. John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus loved us by laying down His life. He suffered for us when we didn't know Him or deserve to be forgiven. Yet, He loved us with a great love.

Because of Jesus, the Scriptures teach us how to love others. First Corinthians 13:4-8 says, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” That's how God loves, and how we should love.

Fifth, we read Scripture because the Bible gives understanding. Psalm 119:130 says, “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.” Again, Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The Bible teaches where we came from, why we're here, and what will happen after we die. It's the only book that can teach us that.

Sixth, we read Scripture because the Bible contains the gospel, the truly good news. First Corinthians 15:1 says, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the

Scriptures.” No news could be more reassuring than this!

Seventh, we read Scripture because the Bible contains the truth. In a world filled with fake news and lies, it's refreshing to have the truth. Luke wrote, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

We need the truth, because false ideas exist. Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:29-32).

Eighth, we read and study Scripture because we want to please God. Paul urged Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Paul wanted Timothy to be approved of God as a workman who handled God's Word correctly. When people are ignorant or twist the Scriptures to suit themselves, they're not handling the Word of God faithfully or accurately. God will not approve of them. No matter who you are, don't assume that you aren't accountable to know God's Word.

The apostle Paul knew people would leave the truth, so he charged Timothy to stay true to God's Word. He said, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:1-4). We see people today fulfilling Paul's prophecy, turning away from the truth and wandering off into myths. The way to truth is to listen to the voice of God found in Scripture, not adding or taking away.

Ninth, we read Scripture because the Word causes us to be born again and purifies our souls. Peter wrote, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 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, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:22-25).

The Scriptures are unalterably linked to our being born again and saved. James 1:18 says, “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Verse 21 explains, “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

The angel of the Lord told Cornelius to send for Peter because, “he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (Acts 11:14). Paul said, “I

am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am 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). The gospel causes us to be saved and to be born again to live for the Lord.

Tenth, we know the gospel truth today because we can read it in the New Testament. The gospel is the powerful Word of God for salvation because the book of Romans says so. In fact, because the teaching and acts of Jesus and the apostles are recorded, we can know God's redemptive message about the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We would not know God's new covenant commandments, His morals, or promises if Jesus had not sent out scribes to record them.

Eleventh, we read Scripture because His Words work in us. "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). God works on us in and through His words.

Twelfth, we read Scripture because the Words of God keep us strong. Psalm 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." Will you read God's Word?

We should take God's Word to heart because they are the Words of God. They are God's message of love and truth; they will bless us if we listen to them. These Words will stand as long as heaven and earth stands (Matthew 24:35); they're not going away. These Words will also judge us one day. 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). The saddest thing I can imagine is to face the Lord on Judgment Day unprepared because you had never taken God's Word seriously or learned to love Him.

Hebrews 2:1-3 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" We don't want you to neglect your salvation, but to hear and obey the Word of God. We say this because we love you.

God's grace will save you when you hear and obey. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." How do we obey? Believe and confess the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, repent of your sins, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. That's what the Bible teaches. Listen and take it to heart, today.

We hope today's study about reading the Bible has encouraged you to study God's Word. There's no better day than today to get your life back on track by going to church. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. Why not worship with them, today? If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one.

The Lord's Supper

Each Lord's Day, God's family gathers to remember and proclaim the death of our Lord Jesus by partaking of the Lord's Supper. What is the Lord's Supper and why do we partake of it each week? We believe the way to follow God is to go back to His Word and find out what's written there, and it comes from God. We know the Bible is always true, and it alone reveals what God's will is for our lives.

The night before Jesus' death was filled with great emotion. Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples and washed their feet. Before the night was over, Judas left their gathering to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. When Jesus predicted someone would betray Him, all His disciples claimed they would never deny Him. That night in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus' heart became troubled with great sorrow even to the point of death. That night Jesus determined that He would do the will of the Father and endure the pain of the cross as a sin offering for us. Before morning, Judas gave Him the kiss of a traitor and Peter denied Him three times. The next day Jesus was falsely tried, scourged, and crucified.

Jesus knew all things and that all these things would happen. In the midst of all this turmoil, Jesus instituted a simple memorial feast to draw attention to the gift of His body and blood for the forgiveness of sin. Remembering the death of the Lord Jesus by eating unleavened bread and drinking some fruit of the vine each Lord's Day moves our hearts to love the Lord and remain faithful to Him. In churches of Christ, the Lord's Supper is a part of our worship every Sunday, because we want always to remember what He has done.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Matthew 26:26-29. This is when Jesus is with His disciples and He institutes the Lord's Supper.

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

We don't know the day when Jesus was born; we know little about his youth; but we know much about His death on the cross. Through the centuries, people devised some yearly holidays, but there is nothing from God in the Bible about celebrating those things. Jesus Himself, however, asks us to remember His death. He asked us to eat unleavened bread and drink fruit of the vine in memory of His body and blood, a simple meal full of meaning. This is how He wanted to be remembered and appreciated.

Christians should live their lives with the cross in their hearts. The apostle Paul said, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). He admitted, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Later he said, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). We must never forget that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin.

The Lord's Supper is a simple memorial meal focusing on the death of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper isn't, as some say, a new sacrifice of Jesus in the sense of the bread being His actual body or the fruit of the vine His actual blood. This mistaken belief led to a number

of unscriptural practices, including the beginning of a special class of priests. The Bible, in 1 Peter 2, clearly teaches that all Christians are priests. Making a class of priests separate from the other people is not Biblical.

The Lord's Supper isn't a means by which we receive the forgiveness of sins. Our communion with Christ in the Supper causes us to remember the cross and the love of God, but it doesn't convey forgiveness. Remembering the sacrifice of Jesus prompts us to repent, but simply eating does not loose us from our sins.

God transforms us from sinners to Christians by His grace when we confess our faith, and God unites us with Christ when we're baptized into Christ according to Romans 6 and Titus 3. The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast for Christians. They observe it after becoming one with Christ at baptism. The purpose for this meal is to remember the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus on the cross. While His blood was shed for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28), the Bible does not say God's forgiving grace is applied to our souls when we eat the bread or drink the cup.

Christians find their forgiveness in the blood of Christ when they confess their sins, repent of them, and ask God's forgiveness according to James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9. Christians partaking of the Lord's Supper look closely at the cross of Christ. This remembering of His sacrifice will no doubt humble them and lead them to confess their sins and ask God's forgiveness. The bread and the cup move us to look at the body and the blood of Jesus. One who loves Christ can hardly think of His painful but loving sacrifice for our sins and not be filled with sorrow for past sins. This sorrow leads to the desire to change; that's repentance.

The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remember Jesus. Paul explains the significance of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The Bible says: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The Lord's Supper is also called communion because we commune with Jesus Christ when we partake of the Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16). The Bible explains this communion in Matthew 26:27-29: "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" To commune is to share a deep spiritual relationship with someone. The Lord's Supper is a means by which Christ draws close to His church or kingdom family.

The Bible says, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine unites the church together with Christ as we focus on what the Lord Jesus has done for us.

In the Lord's Supper, we look backward to the cross. We think of what His body went through on the cross for our sakes. We remember how He gave His body to be scourged, whipped until His flesh was raw and bleeding. We remember His crown of thorns on His

brow, the nails that pierced His hands and feet. We remember the agonizing pain that filled His body from head to toe.

We remember His blood poured out as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. We know that we are loosed from our sins by His blood (Revelation 1:5). We know that we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses (Ephesians 1:7). His blood washes away our sins and reconciles us to God. We remember the spear that pierced His side, and out came blood and water (John 19:34). The Lord's Supper reminds us of the blood poured out for us so that we might enter into a covenant with God.

In the Lord's Supper, we look forward to the second coming. First Corinthians 11:26 says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Each Lord's Day when we partake of the bread and the cup, we reaffirm our faith in the second coming of the Lord Jesus. We know He will come again for those who are washed in His blood to bless and glorify them, and He will judge those who turn away from Him.

In the Lord's Supper, we look inward at how we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine. First Corinthians 11:27-30 says because some did not partake of it in a manner worthy of the Lord they became "weak and sick, and a number sleep." The Bible reveals the reason for their weakness, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

Christians who take the Lord's Supper must discipline their hearts and not become distracted by other things. They must examine themselves to see if they're thinking as they should. Christians need to focus on what Christ has done for them at the cross and not allow the mundane things of life to interfere with their thoughts. Remembering Christ each Lord's Day keeps us strong and faithful. Ignoring the cross opens the door to temptation that leaves us weak and sick.

In the Lord's Supper, we look upward with joy and thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus asked the Father to bless the bread and the cup. We also ask God's blessing. We're sorry that we've sinned against God, which made the death of Jesus necessary; but we're thankful that He willingly paid the price for our sins. When the Lord has sacrificed so greatly, isn't it fitting that we do everything in our power to please and obey Him?

In the New Testament, the early church took the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Acts 20:6-7 says, "And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight." They waited until the last day to break bread, now that's not a common meal, but the Lord's Supper because it was the first day of the week. They could have eaten an ordinary meal anytime, but the Lord's Supper was not just any meal.

They took the Lord's Supper "when" they gathered for this purpose, which suggests that they did not meet at other times for that purpose. The word "Lord's" in the phrases Lord's Supper and Lord's Day is a peculiar term only used twice in Scripture. The Lord's Supper is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:20 and it was regularly eaten on the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). "Breaking bread" in Acts 20:7 refers to the eating of the Lord's Supper

which occurred on the Lord's Day, which was known as the first day of the week.

It's no coincidence that early Christians observed the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, since the term "Lord's" refers only to these two things in Scripture. Everett Ferguson, an early church historian, said, "Both are peculiarly the Lord's, and both belong together, united to each other by the resurrection. The day, as the day of the resurrection, is the day for taking the supper; and the supper, in remembrance of the event of salvation, gives significance to the day."

Early church history confirms that the Lord's Day, the day of the Supper, was the first day of the week. We have no sure record in the Scriptures of the Lord's Supper being observed in the church on any other day. Ferguson notes, "That the Lord's Supper was a constant feature of the Sunday service. There is no second-century evidence for the celebration of a daily 'eucharist' or communion."

Some have questioned the number of cups used in the Lord's Supper. Since the Scriptures refer to "the cup," they assume, by using the word cup, that only one container was used in communion. The word cup here is a figure of speech, it's metonymy, where the container is used to refer to the contents. We cannot physically drink a cup or container, but we can drink the contents of the cup. We drink the fruit of the vine in remembrance of His blood, not the container. A large congregation like the one at Edmond could not possibly drink out of only one container cup, but they all can drink the same contents, the fruit of the vine. We share the cup of blessing by drinking the same fruit of the vine, remembering the blood sacrificed for our sins. We eat of the same bread, though it may be in many different loaves or many different sections, we still eat of the same bread. We remember the body of Jesus Christ. It's for those reasons that we eat of the bread and drink of the cup together, remembering Him. How many cups is irrelevant. Remembering by drinking the content and eating the bread is what matters.

Why do we partake of the Lord's Supper? It reminds us of the love of God and the price Jesus paid for us on the cross. Frankly, I need reminding, and I suspect you do, too. I can't look at the cross and desire sin at the same time. Taking a look at the cross humbles me and humbles you as we consider the sins that we've committed. This will cause us to confess our sins and to repent of them. Perhaps the reason some were weak and dying at Corinth was because they didn't think about the cross during this time. The Lord's Supper will strengthen our devotion to Christ. It will tell the world that we believe in Jesus Christ and proclaim His death until He comes.

Each time we partake of the bread and the cup, we should examine ourselves and focus on Jesus Christ. While eating the bread, we focus on the Lord's body given for us; and while drinking the cup, we concentrate on the Lord's blood that was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. The Lord's Supper is an act of worship involving the heart, the mind, and the soul. It's a memorial of love and thanksgiving.

We also realize that we're communing with our Lord (Matthew 26:29). He's present with us at the Supper. We're remembering His body and blood. The whole church eating one loaf and drinking one cup show the fellowship and unity of brothers and sisters in their devotion to the Lord who sacrificed himself for them.

Christians take the Lord's Supper to declare their love for Him. Do you love the Lord Jesus? Have you become a Christian? To become one, believe Jesus is the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ is God's Son, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Today, is the best day for you to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

Fasting

While the New Testament doesn't command us to fast, there are times when it's right to do so. Today, we're going to explore what the Bible says about fasting. God is the fountain of wisdom and knowledge, and He shares that wisdom and knowledge with us in the Scriptures. God's ways are righteous and pure. The one who follows Him can live the righteous and pure life that honors God. The more we know about God, the more we want to love Him and love other people. The knowledge of God lived out in our lives blesses everyone. Nothing is more valuable than knowing God and living for Him.

Matthew 9:14-15 says, "Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'"

While the New Testament speaks of fasting, it doesn't command it. The early church fasted voluntarily. Jesus spoke of the day when He would no longer be with them, and they would fast. Jesus himself fasted forty days before the devil tempted Him. He knew the value of setting aside the physical to enhance the spiritual.

Fasting means abstaining from food, and possibly drink, for a limited period of time as a mark of religious commitment and devotion or as an expression of repentance for sins. Fasting may seem like a physical thing, but it's really a spiritual discipline, designed to draw us closer to God and to help us grow spiritually. While there are some physical benefits to fasting regularly, the spiritual benefits can be more valuable to our souls.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Matthew 4:1-4. Here Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist, He has gone into the wilderness; and there He's fasting for forty days.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

Yes, we need bread, but we also need the Word of God for our souls. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You have given us Your Word. Help us, heavenly Father, to discipline ourselves and to put the spiritual as more important in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Though the Bible speaks of fasting, we shouldn't assume that all fasting was alike or for the same amount of time. The Bible describes three main forms of fasting: First, there is the normal fast, involving the total abstinence of food. Luke 4:2 reveals that Jesus was tempted for forty days. "And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry." Usually, a fast only lasts one day. The Law of Moses prescribed that the Israelites would "afflict themselves," that is, fast, during the Day of Atonement.

Second, there are some absolute fasts like Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:9, where for three days He "neither did eat nor drink." Esther, seeing how the lives of all the Jews were at stake, said, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

Third, there is a partial fast; that is, eating some foods but abstaining from others. Daniel 1:8 says, “But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.” For whatever reason, Daniel regarded the food and the wine of the king as unclean; he belonged to the true God and did not want to displease Him. Daniel and his three friends restricted their diet rather than complete abstinence. The context implies that there were physical benefits resulting from this partial fast. However, this verse indicates that God was with Daniel in this time of fasting. On another occasion, Daniel abstained from “pleasant bread,” flesh, wine, and anointing for three weeks (Daniel 10:3).

God instructed the children of Israel not to eat anything with leaven during the week of the Passover. God said, “Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Exodus 13:7-8). God gives commands like this for a spiritual purpose, to remind us of His kindness and His power.

The spiritual discipline of fasting is not simply a denial of food; it has an important spiritual focus that turns from the physical circumstances to focus on God. Sometimes people fasted as a means of confessing sin and repentance. After Nehemiah finished building the wall around the city of Jerusalem, they worshiped and read from the book of the law of God, explaining it so the people understood. Once they heard this law, they knew they had sinned. Nehemiah 9:1-3 says, “Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.”

While many consider sin as trivial, God does not. These Jews, who heard the law of the Lord, knew they had sinned against God. They rejoiced over God, but knew sin was in their lives. Sin is serious business with God; when we learn that we’ve sinned, we should change our hearts and our lives in repentance.

Sometimes people fasted at a time of mourning. When David learned King Saul and his son, Jonathan had died, “David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the people of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword” (2 Samuel 1:11-12).

Sometimes people fasted to seek God’s favor at a critical time. When the child born to David and Bathsheba was on his deathbed, David lay on the ground for seven days and fasted; but after the child died, David arose, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. David first went to the house of the Lord and worshiped and then came home. Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” He said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:21-23).

When King Jehoshaphat was facing war with Moab, Ammon, and others, he began to seek the Lord. Second Chronicles 20:3-4 says, “Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to

seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.” Fasting and praying is one way that we seek the Lord and turn to Him in times of trouble. Since fasting became a recognized way of seeking Divine favor and protection, it was natural that it should be associated with confession of sin, as evidence of penitence or sorrow for sin.

Sometimes people fasted before an important task in the service of God. When Ezra asked King Artaxerxes to provide the money for supplies and utensils for the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, the king granted him all that he requested because he knew God was with him. Ezra gathered the leading men of Israel to go with him to Jerusalem. Ezra said, “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, ‘The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.’ So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty” (Ezra 8:21-23). Ezra’s prayer and fasting mattered to God, and God protected them.

When Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey, they appointed elders to watch after the congregations. Acts 14:23 says, “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” The work of an elder, who is also a shepherd, is very critical to the church. That’s why they fasted and prayed. You’ll notice they appointed a plurality of elders in every congregation. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 give the qualifications of elders. While a minister sometimes serves as an elder, biblically speaking, it is a mistake to call a minister like me a “pastor,” unless he also serves as an elder or shepherd, which I am not.

Unlike the Old Testament, which commanded fasting on the Day of Atonement, the New Testament never commands Christians to fast. We have examples of the Lord and of the disciples fasting, but we have no commandment. According to the Jewish Christian historian, Alfred Edersheim, some of the stricter sects among the Jews would fast from sunset to sunset. They not only abstained from food, they also made rules against washing, anointing, of every kind of agreeable activity, and even salutations. Such fasting was generally practiced in the most austere and pretentious manner, among the Pharisees, becoming showy displays. Sadly, some Christian denominations have made their own laws requiring fasting; but they have done this outside the teaching of Scripture. They have bound man-made traditions.

The Lord Jesus taught, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). He illustrates this principle by talking about fasting. He said, “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18). Showy religion leads people to concentrate on themselves. The purpose of our worship is to focus upon God. If we wish to draw close to God, then let’s focus on Him. There’s a difference between worship in spirit and truth, and showmanship.

Isaiah spoke of people who fasted, but their voices weren’t being heard because they sought their own pleasures and oppressed others. They went through the motions of fasting but they

really didn't change their lives. God said through Isaiah, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am'" (Isaiah 58:6-9).

Abstinence in fasting is a form of self-discipline. What it does is it renounces for a time the enjoyments and the needs of the flesh so that it can focus on God and on the spiritual. When we abstain from food or other pleasures, keeping our physical wants in check, we can focus our interests on a higher purpose and a nobler cause. Colossians 3:1-4 urges us, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Abstinence deals with our distractions in this world and points us to what really matters. Do you recall the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:24-26, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Just as we must feed our bodies to live physically, we must also feed our souls if we wish to live with Christ.

Let's pray together. O Father, we are so grateful for Your love. We are so grateful that You have blessed us through Christ Jesus our Lord. And we pray, Father, that we may set our hearts upon serving You and seek the things that are above and not the things on this earth. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.

You may want to fast at some point to help you get your focus back upon God. You may need to confess your sins and repent of them as you fast. You may be facing a critical decision in life. You may be suffering with sorrow over a loved one who's gone. Fasting will help you build self-discipline, something that we all need from time to time. Let this be voluntary and private between you and God. Pray and study the Scriptures, determine to live a righteous life before God. Use that time and fasting to grow in your faith, and in your knowledge of God's Word, and in your love for God.

Drawing close to God ought to remind you of your need to worship regularly, to study the Bible diligently, to serve others joyfully, and to share your faith openly. If you're a Christian, you belong to God; you are not your own. While Jesus didn't command us to observe a certain fast, He does set an example for us. We also read about voluntary fasting in the early church.

More important than fasting, however, is your soul being right with God! Nothing is more valuable to you than your soul. It's better to cut off your right hand and pluck out your eye than to lose your soul. Draw near to God by placing your faith in Jesus Christ and confessing Him as the Son of God. Repent of your sins and be baptized into Christ, at which point God will wash away your sins and forgive you. When you're baptized, God will make you His child, add you to His church, and cause you to be born again. Be baptized! Draw close to God today!