

Program Transcripts

For April 2019



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

April 2019

Topics subject to change without notice

APRIL 7 – DEALING WITH GUILT

Everyone has a conscience, which causes us guilt and shame when we sin. God gives us the answer to the problem of guilt by offering us forgiveness and peace through the blood of Jesus Christ.

APRIL 14 – DEALING WITH ANXIETY

The problems of life are never ceasing, and the news we hear can cause us to worry about what the future will bring. Instead of worry and uncertainty, God offers us some solid promises that give us the reassurance we need.

APRIL 21 – DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT

Down times, losses, and defeats happen to all of us. We can easily begin to think there is no hope in this life and no hope for eternal life. Because of Jesus we can have hope and courage to face the future.

APRIL 28 – DEALING WITH PAIN

Pain and sorrow can affect us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. How can we have a positive attitude when our lives are filled with pain? God gives us a better perspective of hope than merely seeing the hurts of the present.

Dealing with Guilt

You've probably looked at yourself in the mirror and asked "Why did you do that?" A guilty conscience is common to all. Today, we're exploring what the Bible says about our conscience. Whatever spiritual, moral, or social problem we face, God has the answer in His Word! The problems that you face are new to you, but not new to this world. The struggles you face are struggles many others have faced throughout time. The Scriptures describe these problems and God's answers to them. When people humbly and penitently come to God seeking answers, He hears their cries and helps them. By going to His Word, you can find the answers to your struggles, too.

David described the pain he felt from knowing he had sinned. After David sinned with Bathsheba and slaughtered Uriah in battle, he felt the sting of his conscience. David felt the pain of unresolved sin, saying, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4). David also said, "For evils beyond number have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head, And my heart has failed me" (Psalm 40:12).

The chief meaning of the word "conscience" in the New Testament includes more than knowing something. It includes a moral judgment of a conscious act. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira pretended to offer the whole gift of the sale of their land to God, but knowingly kept back some for themselves, and lied to the Holy Spirit. They consciously lied. God knew it, too! You cannot fool God by pretending. God always knows.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Letter to Titus 3:3-7, talking about the grace of God and how it takes us from where we were to where God wants us to be.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We have a battle between good and evil going on inside our hearts. The Lord Jesus said to sleepy Peter, James, and John, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). While we would like to practice what's good, we find ourselves weak and doing what is evil. When we do what is good, we're at peace with ourselves; but when we do what is evil, we regret and even hate what we've done. Paul explained, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:14-15).

The conscience inside us nags and accuses us. Romans 2:14-16 says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ

Jesus.” The truth of this remark is evident since God sees man's conscience both negatively and positively – negatively as the instrument of judgment, and positively as the means of guidance. Few experiences in life are more miserable than a guilty conscience. Jeremiah wrote, “‘For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,’ says the Lord GOD” (Jeremiah 2:22).

We also know what we've done. People handle guilt in a variety of ways. Some would rather lie to themselves about sin than face a guilty conscience. I'm amazed at how society has changed its views of right and wrong. Society has turned things upside down. Instead of using God's Word as the measure of right and wrong, people have trusted in their own hearts. Some have trusted their feelings rather than listen to God. They have made themselves their own god. The Lord God said, “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

When people try to change what the Scriptures say to excuse sin as fashionable, they deceive themselves. The prophet Isaiah said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). You may justify sin in your own mind, but that doesn't mean that God approves. This approach, changing sin, isn't new. The Jews in Jeremiah's day worshiped pagan gods and practiced immorality even though they knew better. Jeremiah 6:15 says, “‘Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down,’ says the LORD.”

You can lie to yourself about moral matters, but God sees and knows the truth. God said, “For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes” (Jeremiah 16:17). When people live impure lives, it becomes noticeable not only to God but to everyone. The way they talk, the way they act, and the way they treat other people make it evident that God isn't in their lives. Titus 1:15-16 says, “To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

We need God in our lives. We need to hear His Word, to worship Him, and to pray to Him each day. We need the saving blood of Jesus Christ to transform our lives. Apart from the blood of Christ, people can't find salvation; the unredeemed man is “without strength” to save himself (Romans 5:6-8). We need saving, rescuing, and transforming! Paul said that Jesus “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). God wanted something better for people than a life enslaved to sin and headed for wrath.

Romans 6:20-22 says, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.” You don't have to live ashamed any longer. You can leave enslavement to sin and you can be made holy; and you can have eternal life.

Titus 2:11-14 describes what grace does for you and me. “For the grace of God that brings

salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” The grace of God is not simply just for forgiveness; it also causes transformation so sinners can become saints. God wants something better for you than languishing in guilt and shame!

The Lord God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). If God had not delivered us, we'd still be living miserable and hopeless lives in sin and guilt. God wants something better for us!

Paul spoke of his conversion in 1 Timothy 1:12-15. He said, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” God's forgiveness opens the door for us to forgive ourselves. If God could forgive us, we can forgive, too!

The apostle Paul never forgot that he had once been Saul of Tarsus; he realized that he had been saved in order to lead others to salvation. He spoke as one delivered from the captivity of sin. He understood what it meant to be forgiven of his terrible sins, so he desperately sought for the salvation of everyone. He could say, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, 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). To the Jew, a Roman would be an enemy; but Paul was eager to take that message even to his enemies in Rome. Paul loved even his enemies.

God wants something better for you. First Timothy 2:3-4 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.” God wants you to know the truth about sin and salvation. He wants you to be saved from sin.

A clean conscience, brought about by love and obedience to the gospel, brings peace of heart and mind. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” First Peter 3:21 reveals how baptism not only is the time of our salvation but also brings about a good conscience. It says, “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” When we're baptized we are calling upon God to save us and to cleanse our consciences. Remember what Ananias told the apostle Paul in Acts 22:16, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

In another Psalm, David cried out, “Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away

from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit” (Psalm 51:8-12).

The New Testament also provides occasions of joy when one obeys the gospel and becomes a child of God in Christ. The Bible says, “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he (the eunuch) went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” There is no greater joy than knowing that you are right with God, that your sins are forgiven, and that you have a home in heaven! I can't imagine living even one day or one hour without God's grace and without hope.

I don't know where you are in your relationship with God. You may be living with guilt and without hope. You may be indifferent to God, and His promises, and His commandments. You may have once practiced your faith but have drifted from it. You may be one of those who rewrite the Scriptures to say what you want. Please don't remain in doubt, outside the grace of God. While God loves everybody; He wants everyone to be saved; God makes no promise to save those who ignore or defy His will.

David understood the blessing of being forgiven and trusting in God. So he wrote, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!” (Psalm 32:1-2). When we're honest with God and honest with ourselves about sin, we'll act. The consequences of sin are great. God will punish evildoers.

We must not presume that we can live any way we please, and the grace of God will still cover us. That idea didn't come from God; it came from Satan. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

When you feel guilty for what you've thought, said, or done, repent! Knowing you're guilty will bring you all the pain that David felt or Paul felt from having sinned. Paul spoke openly about sin to the Romans, about their choices, whether to live in sin or in righteousness. He said, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).

The good news of Christ is His grace that brings freedom from sin! You can choose freedom from sin! You don't have to stay a slave to sin and all the guilt and shame that comes with it! When you place your faith in Christ Jesus and confess Him as the Son of God, when you repent of your sins and turn to the Lord's way, and when you're baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you cease to be the slave of sin! Christ sets you free from sin, and you are free indeed! (John 8:36). You are free from sin, free from guilt, and free from shame. You can begin acting like a child of God and live righteously. You can have peace with God and with your soul. I cannot think of any greater joy or privilege than to have the hope of eternal life! Are you right with God?

Dealing with Anxiety

The future is uncertain, and life is full of challenges. How can we deal with it? Today, we're exploring how to deal with all of our anxieties. I'm thankful God has made His way known to us in the Bible. The Lord's way leads to peace today and salvation forever. God's way blesses us with comfort and assurance, with grace and joy, and with hope and promise. Nothing will bring you greater blessing than having a right relationship with the Lord. The answers that you need to the most pressing problems of life are found in Jesus Christ and His Word. And that's why we continually point to the Lord's way.

Life challenges us with many worries and pressures. Many adults find it hard to get a good night's sleep, worried about keeping appointments, growing financial problems, declining health, or a host of family difficulties. One lady recently told me, "I just can't help worrying about things. I keep wondering what's going to happen to me." This lady believed in God but she took her focus off of God and onto her troubles. This left her anxious and upset. She had gotten into the habit of worrying about things that she couldn't change—and life was miserable. What could she do?

The world in which Jesus lived was also filled with heartaches and anxieties, just as today's world. He could see the hurts and problems people faced every day. He knew about poverty and disease and grief. In His day, there were no hospitals, no social security, no fire houses, and no ambulances. Life was never easy. In the most well-known sermon ever preached, Jesus devoted ten verses to the problem of worrying. In just a few verses, he gave such a great comfort and reassurance to His followers that it is worth our time to listen closely to His wisdom.

Our reading today comes from Philippians 4:4-9; it gives the answer to finding peace.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Lord Jesus said, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows

that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:25-34).

Jesus said, "Do not be worried about your life." Older versions say, "take no thought for your life." In today's language, this phrase suggests that we're to live without care or caution; but that's not the point. Jesus was cautioning against the kind of anxiety that forgets God and that sees no hope for tomorrow. Faith sees the help of God in tough times; it trusts that God will take care of us. Anxiety, on the other hand, is full of doubt and fear. Anxiety is doubt at work; it is always uncertain. It fears the worst and ignores the watching care of a loving Father in heaven. It forgets God's promises.

Verse 25 asks, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" If God our Father has given us life, surely we can trust him to provide the food and clothes we need to sustain life. Anyone who has given the extravagant gift will not be stingy or careless with the smaller gifts. Paul said, "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?" (Romans 8:32).

In verse 26, Jesus speaks about the birds, and how God feeds them. They don't worry about piling up goods for an unforeseen future; and yet their lives continue because God feeds them. Jesus asked, "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" (verse 27). Other versions translate this, "which can add a cubit to his stature?" (that is, "eighteen inches to his height"). Either way, worry is pointless. It doesn't help matters. Anxiety, rather than helping you with your problem, causes nervousness, sleeplessness, and irritability. An anxious person often jumps the gun and does things hastily, which may cause more problems than he desired.

In verses 28 to 30, Jesus pointed to the flowers of the field. He said, "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" God takes care of His people. If he hasn't forgotten the wildflower which used to help start a fire, now He won't forget you. You're worth far more.

Jesus called the anxious one a person of "little faith," little trust in His goodness and kindness. The Lord compares the worrier to the Gentiles, who don't know God. He said, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." You can expect a pagan or an unbeliever not to know about God, but Jesus expects more out of His followers. When one knows God, one should not have to live in worry and anxiety about the necessities of life.

Jesus' prescription for the Christian, the believer, is to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:33-34). We must learn to live one day at a time. If we live each day as it comes, and do each task as it arises, then we'll have the strength and the grace of God to help us through each step. Handle the demands of each day as it comes, not fretting over unknown things, which may never happen. Anxiety is more about what we don't know than the One we do know.

Anxiety can't change the past, however hard we try. Instead of rehearsing in our hearts

old failures, old hurts, old sins, and old injuries, we're better off to learn from our past. That way we won't make the same mistakes in the future. Worry about the future is useless. The biggest troubles are usually those that never happen. Our imagination may dream up things that never happen. Anxiety is a waste of effort and time, since the future that really happens is hardly ever as bad as the future of our fears. Don't let an over-active imagination keep you from living life, a life of joy and peace, free from upset and worry. God's prophet said, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:31). Peace is the opposite of fear and doubt. A person at peace is confident and unafraid.

Philippians 4:4-9, which we read earlier, has the prescription for anxiety. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

First, rejoice in the Lord always. Consider how God has blessed you. Count your blessings every single day. When your mind is on the Lord and His love for you, you won't get caught up in worrying over the future. You'll keep your trust and focus on the good God and what He has done for you!

Second, cultivate a forbearing spirit—one that doesn't react hastily and negatively to everything that happens. Develop a sweet spirit of reasonableness. Grow a heart of understanding that gives others the benefit of the doubt.

Third, remember the Lord is near or "at hand." He sees and knows everything that happens to you. He's not distant or unconcerned. God is your Father, and He'll be very near to you to help you when you need Him.

Fourth, stop worrying about anything. Get out of the habit of getting upset about every unhappy event and disappointment. Examine yourself. How do you react to problems? Do you get emotionally worked up over every little thing? You don't have to worry, you can do something.

Fifth, in every circumstance pray. Pray with an attitude of thanksgiving. Tell God what you need. Don't hold back. Let Him know. He's ready to listen and to help answer your requests. When you ask, the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. God will place a guard all around you to keep you secure so that you might be at peace. God's help means that you can take control of your heart and mind. You don't have to be a slave of anxiety and doubt and fear. You can be at rest with God.

Sixth, decide now where you want your thoughts to live. We decide what we think about all day long. We make the choices that affect our happiness or our misery. Your emotional life will reflect what you choose to think about. Paul said, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8). Some folks dwell on the ugly, the depressing, the sinful, the impure, the failures, and the critical. It is no wonder their

attitudes in life are sour and pessimistic.

Seventh, practice doing God's will. Paul said, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (verse nine). When people follow what they have learned and seen in the Word of God and in genuine Christianity, they'll find a peaceful relationship with God. The righteous man can go to bed at night with peace in his heart, but the wicked man continually worries his sins will be found out. He's always scared and hiding something. The loving person finds peace with others, but the hateful person's life is filled with strife and tension.

Solomon said, "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. 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 your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones" (Proverbs 3:1-8). The more we follow the will of God, the more we'll find the peace and grace God gives.

When you're at peace with yourself, at peace with others, and at peace with God, you'll find little to worry about. The best way to peace is through listening to God and through following His Word. Perhaps one reason people are so uptight and anxious is they've never found the peace that God gives. Paul said, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). It is through faith in Christ and obedience to His will that we enter the peace of God. Don't let another day go by without God's peace in your life. Come to the Lord. Obey the gospel and find God's wonderful peace.

All the water in the world, however hard it tried, could never, never sink a ship unless it got inside. All the hardships of this world, might wear you pretty thin, but they won't hurt you, one least bit, unless you let them in.

I ask people I counsel from time to time, "Who rules your mind? Who's in charge of what you think?" We decide what we'll think about and what we'll ignore. The best thing we can do with worry is to set our minds on something else. The more we focus on the Lord, the less we'll worry about things that don't matter or things that may never happen.

The apostle Peter said, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). If you let worries burden you, you'll be overloaded and stressed. But if you give them to the Lord, you can live free. Occasionally people cast their anxieties on Jesus and then take them back. Once you've put a matter in God's hands, trust Him to take care of it. Leave it in His hands.

Draw close to God in faith, love Him, and obey Him. If you want God as your Father, then obey Him as you would a father. Have you become a Christian? Believe, trust, and love the Lord! Repent of your sins! Confess the name of Jesus and be baptized, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized the Lord will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16). You will be born again (John 3:5). By faith, when you're baptized, you'll become a child of God (Galatians 3:26-27). You can start a whole new life today by responding to the Lord's invitation to follow Him. The way of the Lord leads to peace.

Dealing with Discouragement

Troubles come to all of us, and they leave us discouraged. How can we deal with the problems of discouragement? God is the source of every good thing and every perfect gift (James 1:17); and He knows how to bless us in every circumstance of life. His Word gives us wisdom that cannot fail. If we will listen closely to what God teaches and apply it to our lives, we'll find the answers to our problems and struggles. Don't give up! God has an answer!

Wise Solomon, by inspiration, said, "The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?" (Proverbs 18:14). Perhaps you've been through a difficult time, and it's left you down and discouraged. Perhaps your health is declining, and you can't stop it. Perhaps you've lost a loved one or your job. Perhaps you feel life won't get any better for you. We all get discouraged when things fail to meet our expectations, and we can easily lose heart and hope.

Proverbs 3:5-7 promises, "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 your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." David trusted in the Lord and prevailed over Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Elijah trusted in the Lord and prevailed over 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted in the Lord and prevailed over the fiery furnace in Daniel 3; and Daniel trusted in the Lord and prevailed over the lions in Daniel 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and God will make your paths straight.

Our reading, today, comes from the best known Psalm of all the Bible, Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

What a great promise and a great God we serve. Let's pray together. Father, we're so thankful that You watch over us and care for our every need. Father, help us to devote ourselves to You. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Solomon wrote, "A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken" (Proverbs 15:13). Again, he said, "A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). Some event or series of events may have broken your spirit and caused you to lose heart.

Discouragement is a common experience. Never imagine that you're the first to face some difficult struggle. Others have faced these problems. David once remarked, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Behold, I would wander far away, I would lodge in the wilderness" (Psalm 55:4-8). We all wish we could run away from our present circumstances, but we can't run away from life. The Lord Jesus said, "Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

Sometimes our troubles overwhelm us, and we suppose God has somehow forgotten us. David felt like that. He said, "I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why

do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (Psalm 42:9-10). David answers his question and finds hope, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God" (verse 11).

Several of God's people have gone through periods where they felt lost and alone, discouraged by their circumstances. When Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah, he fled to the wilderness. He finally sat down under a juniper tree, waiting and wanting to die. He said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). God, however, had more work for Elijah to do. Jeremiah, the prophet, preached to the people of Jerusalem for forty years and yet suffered rejection and persecution. He said, "Woe to me, my mother, that you have borne me As a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land! I have not lent, nor have men lent money to me, Yet everyone curses me" (Jeremiah 15:10).

Even Jesus had times that were extremely difficult. When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:37-38 says, "And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.'" Jesus went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed. Have you ever felt so discouraged you wish you could die? Jesus felt that way, but He put His Father's will first. He said, "Not my will but Yours be done."

Paul and Silas had a bad day in Philippi. They healed a young lady who was demon-possessed. The owners of that slave girl saw that they were going to lose money, so they had them arrested and accused them of teaching customs unlawful to Romans. Paul and Silas received many blows with rods, were thrown into prison, and had their feet fastened in the stocks. What did Paul and Silas do? They prayed and they sang hymns to God (Acts 16:25). They were suffering, yes, but they never quit on God.

When Jesus traveled through Israel, He saw discouraged people. Matthew 9:36-38 says, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'" Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray for workers who could teach the people the truth. Perhaps you are discouraged with what you are being taught, or you feel discouraged because of the gospel truth that religious leaders are failing to teach. Many think they can improve on what the Scriptures teach, but they end up leading people to confusion and chaos.

If you're discouraged, consider what God can do to encourage your heart. There is hope! God can make a difference. Psalm 147:3 says of God, "He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds." You may think you're facing your problem alone, but God sees and knows what is going on. He's there with you.

Paul found himself troubled by a painful problem, a problem he had to live with. God wouldn't take it away. He describes the experience. He said, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 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. 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 12:7-10).

You might think God was cruel in refusing to take away Paul's thorn in the flesh, whatever it was. God was keeping Paul humble and teaching him an important lesson about problems. Christ's power shines the brightest when we're at our darkest. His power is greatest when we're at our weakest. Paul changed his attitude about problems. They are opportunities to see the power of God working in us. God doesn't have to work a miracle to work in our lives. His grace is powerful enough to show His love and His favor toward us.

Discouragement often comes when we focus on all the things that we don't have, rather than recall all the things that we do have. 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." Remember who you are. You are God's child. First Peter 2:9-10 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of GOD; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." There's no greater blessing than to be God's chosen people, His children.

Remember that you have a future much better than your present. Your troubles today don't mean you won't have God's blessing in the future. The apostle Paul suffered greatly for his faith. Paul revealed to the Corinthians how much he had endured for Christ. He said, "Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

There's more than this in the life of Paul and in his thinking. He said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). David said, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13). Heaven still awaits, and nothing can stop the promises of God.

Your troubles are not all bad. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Your troubles may be the very thing strengthening and making you the complete person God wants you to be. Attitude makes the difference. Things happen that you didn't choose, but you can choose how you react to them. You can get angry; you can feel defeated; or you can look for what they teach you and feel a blessing. Stay faithful to the Lord, and He'll use your struggles to make you stronger, a more complete Christian.

David said, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). Sometimes it takes a period of humbling before we see the need to repent. Sometimes it takes opening our hearts to a problem that makes us want to find a solution and comfort. The

down times educate us for the victories.

Don't stop there. Your experiences of overcoming or living with a struggle can lead you to help others who face the same problem. You understand what God has done for you. You can give hope to someone who is discouraged. Second Corinthians 1:3-5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."

We all struggle when we face a problem for the first time. We want to handle it wisely. If you don't know how to deal with your struggles, those you're facing, then study God's Word and remember James 1:5-8: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

God knows all our problems; and with God's help, we can stay faithful. Nothing is too big for God to handle; and when you hold to God, you're in His hands. We walk by faith and not by sight. God told Israel, "Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary" (Isaiah 40:30-31). Again, He said, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). If you hold fast to God, He will hold fast to you.

Let's pray together. O Father help us always to hold fast to You, even in the most troublesome times. May Your will be done on earth; in Jesus' name, Amen.

When I'm down from facing bad news, I like to remember 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, which says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a poem that speaks true to life. "One ship sails East, And another West, By the self-same winds that blow, 'Tis the set of the sails And not the gales, That tells the way we go. Like the winds of the sea Are the waves of time, As we journey along through life, 'Tis the set of the soul, That determines the goal, And not the calm or the strife."

In what direction have you set your soul? Do you have faith in God, or have you given up on God? Do you still hope for a home in heaven? I'm praying that you're prepared to live with God forever. To be prepared you must have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be willing to confess it. Repent of your sins, turn from evil, and follow the Lord Jesus. Then be baptized, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins. And when you do, God will wash away your sins, make you His child, and add you to His church. As a Christian, stay faithful to Christ and His church.

Dealing with Pain

From the time we're born, we struggle with the problem of pain. Pain affects us all, but how do we deal with it? That's our subject, today. The Scriptures give us an assurance, even in the hardest times of life. Suffering is not pleasant for anyone, and questions arise about why we suffer. The Scriptures are not silent about suffering for God sees and knows everything that happens. The Scriptures reassure us of His compassion when our bodies and our hearts ache.

We all face suffering. Job 14:1 says, "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble." He's certainly right. Even if everything seems fine today, we don't know what will happen tomorrow. Proverbs 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." No one is immune to suffering. Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all."

Some suffering comes upon us suddenly; it's traumatic and devastating. Other causes of suffering are chronic and unrelenting; they wear us down over time. Those who have faced the cruelty of pain, whether short or long, need the comfort and help of God. Some think pain and suffering means God doesn't care, but God knows our pain. Others question God's goodness if they suffer pain or loss, but the God of the Bible is the God who loves us enough to send His Son, Jesus, to suffer for us. First Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." Christ suffered, too!

Our reading today comes from the book of Lamentations 3:21-25. Jeremiah's heart is broken because Jerusalem is destroyed. The temple is torn down. He speaks of his bitterness and how his soul is down inside of him and it's bowed down.

This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him." The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him.

Where do trouble and pain come from? If you're asking why one hurts and another is spared, we can't give a specific reason. We don't know why. Some who endure great pain blame God for all their suffering. Lamentations 3:33 says about God, "for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men." God didn't pick you out of all the earth to intentionally afflict or grieve you with suffering.

The suffering in our world began as a consequence to Adam's sin. God placed thorns and thistles on the earth. God told Adam, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field" (Genesis 3:17-18). Disease and death has followed humanity since the beginning, and everyone follows the same journey to the grave. There are no exceptions. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." We're imperfect people, vulnerable people living in a world filled

with disease and natural disasters. None of us can expect to be exempt from pain or from death.

Sometimes people ask, "Why doesn't God stop all sin and suffering?" If He stopped it all, He would stop you, too. He would take away your free will and freedom to experience anything that might be a danger. Instead of being a human made in God's image, you'd be a puppet or robot. God knew that giving Adam and Eve freedom meant that they might, of their own will, sin against Him. They sinned and caused untold suffering on all people, even the innocent.

Some of our suffering, sadly, comes from our own making. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." People tend to deceive themselves about their sins and assume their sins won't hurt anything; but those who sow sinful things reap a bitter harvest. Psalm 7:14-16 says, "Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends." People imagine they can do anything they please and don't realize the heavy price they pay for sin. You can't keep on sinning and expect life to bless you with good things. Your life will have a lot of brokenness until that time comes when you change your ways and repent.

Psalm 32:10 says "Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD." In spite of our sins, God still treats His children better than we deserve. When Ezra recognized all the wickedness of the people of Israel, he observed, "And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved" (Ezra 9:13).

God disciplines His people, but He does it because He loves them and acts to lead them to be better people. Hebrews 12:5-7 says, "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' For it is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

Hebrews 12:10-11 explains, "For they (speaking of our parents) disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he (God) disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Some suffering comes from the evil deeds that other people commit. Hatred, anger, war, terrorism, greed, lust, power, pride, and selfishness lead people to do unspeakably evil things and cause great suffering to others. Sin is at the foundation of so much fighting and violence. James 4:1-2 explains, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." Paul told the Ephesians elders, "the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:23). The apostle Paul suffered much from his enemies for preaching Jesus Christ.

Chronic pain can tempt us to doubt and wonder whether God understands or cares. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” When you are hurting, draw close to God and pray. The One who bore the cross knows what pain is.

Some imagine Jesus could not know anything about pain, but that would be a mistaken assumption. Jesus came to earth and experienced all the struggles that we face and more. Philippians 2:6-8 says Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Because He took on flesh, Jesus faced all the physical limitations that we face. He became hungry, thirsty, and weary. When the soldiers scourged Him, He felt great pain. When nails pierced his hands and feet, He suffered and died. Because Jesus himself suffered, He was compassionate with those who suffer. When He saw the sick, he felt compassion and healed them. When he saw the multitude that was downcast and depressed like sheep without a shepherd, He felt compassion for them. When He lost His friend, Lazarus, He wept with Mary and Martha.

When you hurt or struggle in life, the Lord knows. What can you do? First, look to Jesus and how He handled suffering. First Peter 2:21-24 describes how He entrusted Himself to God: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 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.”

Entrust yourself to God. If you focus on God, you’ll take your focus off your suffering and pain. Jesus knew His present sufferings would end, and God would receive Him home. On the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ called out His last words with a loud voice and said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). Put yourself into God’s hands. He cares for you.

Second, depend on the grace of God. Paul faced a painful problem and prayed to God. He learned something valuable. He describes his experience, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me (torment me), to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Suffering causes us to reach out to God, depending on His grace. We all face struggles and challenges bigger than we can handle alone. God’s grace doesn’t remove every thorn, but it does empower us to endure that thorn in our own flesh. God’s grace is sufficient, and He can help you!

Third, consider the story of Job. Job suffered so greatly that he cursed the day of his birth

and he wished he had died at birth. He lost his children and all his possessions. Satan afflicted him with painful boils from head to toe. His wife told him to “Curse God and die.” Even his friends were miserable comforters and said his own sins brought on all his suffering; of course they did not. During all of this, Job could say, “‘The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:21-22). When Job wanted to call God to account for his suffering, God didn’t answer him directly; but He did appear to him in a whirlwind and ask Job many questions that Job couldn’t answer. God revealed things “too wonderful for” Job, things “which (Job said) I did not know.” Even today, we don’t know all the reasons why things happen the way they happen. Ultimately, God restored the fortunes of Job. He blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. You too have another chapter in your life beyond this one. Don’t despair; hope in God.

Fourth, according to Galatians 1:4, Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” Jesus rescues people by forgiving sins and transforming lives. People can die to the old life of sin and live for righteousness. God’s grace leads us to be zealous for good works. God comforts and teaches us how to comfort others. Many Christians who struggle with pain and problems spend their lives helping others to cope with pain and problems, because of the love of God. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The heart of Christ is big, not small. He teaches us in Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Christians have done so throughout their history, and they care for those who hurt.

The love of Christ has built thousands of hospitals, children’s homes, homes for seniors, and counseling centers. The love of Christ has moved churches and Christians to help families with their problems, to help the addicted, and to minister to prisoners. They’ve done a thousand other things to bless all people. Galatians 6:10 says, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Our sorrows are not so big when we’re helping other people.

When we’re hurting, let’s keep our faith. The more we study God’s Word, the stronger our faith will become. The more we look to Jesus, fixing our hope on Him, the more we can cope with the struggles of life. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

When we suffer, let’s look to the joy set before us. Suffering will not keep us out of heaven, unless we give up on God. There’s great joy in heaven for the person who loves God. Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). We need Christ to save us and help us.

To be right with Christ, place your faith in Him; turn from the evil of sin to righteousness in repentance; confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and be baptized into Christ. At the time of baptism, God will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16), give you newness of life (Romans 6:4), make you His child (Galatians 3:26-27), and add you to His church (Acts 2:47). Hold fast to the Lord throughout life; never give up on God. God wants you to be saved and to live in heaven with Him forever.