

# *Program Transcripts*

**For November 2019**



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**November 2019**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **NOVEMBER 3—GOD WITH US**

Does it matter whether God is with us? If we live in the favor and blessing of God, we have hope and a future with God; but if we are far from God, our hope and destiny is far different. Is God with you?

## **NOVEMBER 10— WE NEED THE CHURCH**

Many people think you can be a good Christian without being a member of any church. Is church really necessary? We're going to look at how the Lord Jesus sees the church and how important the church is to our salvation.

## **NOVEMBER 17— YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE**

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time and comes today in hundreds of languages. God gave us His word to instruct us and to bring us to a knowledge of the truth. It reassuring to know that we can understand the Bible.

## **NOVEMBER 24—GIVING THANKS**

At this season of the year, it is only right that we give thanks to our Father in heaven who has blessed us materially and spiritually. Wise Christians give thanks every day, having counted their many blessings.

## God With Us

Does it matter whether God is with us? Today, we're exploring the blessing of having God with us. The Bible is like a mirror that allows a person to see himself as God sees him. If you wish to look into your soul, read and meditate on the Scriptures. They will sometimes assure you, and they will sometimes show your faults and weaknesses. They will surely tell you what God sees, thinks, feels, and says. We're wise to pay close attention to what God says, if we wish to have His blessing.

An angel of the Lord told Joseph, when he considered Mary's condition, "'She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name IMMANUEL,' which translated means, 'GOD with us'" (Matthew 1:21-23). We can certainly see God with us in the life of Jesus who revealed what God is like.

Jesus promised, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Paul often closed his epistles with a phrase similar to "the Lord be with you." In Romans 15:33 he told the Romans, "Now the God of peace be with you all." Later he said, "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" (Romans 16:20). He told the Corinthians, "the God of love and peace be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). Such greetings speak of God's favor and blessing for those who love and obey Him. Do you love and obey Him? Is God's favor with you? Our reading today is a very familiar reading from the psalms of David, 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 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.

Jesus came into this world as Immanuel, "God with us." Having a relationship with God is the most important relationship of all. When God is with us, we have His favor and blessing. If God is absent from our lives we're spiritually alone and without hope. For this reason I want God in my heart and in my life. I want to cling to Him and like Jesus I want always to do the things that are pleasing to Him (John 8:29).

What happens when God is with us? What difference does it make? We might consider the case of Noah. In the days of Noah, the Lord "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart." But God determined, at that time, to blot out man, yet "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). Noah and his family, eight persons, were saved; but the rest of the people on

earth perished in the flood.

Even though Joseph's older brothers hated him and sold him into slavery, God took care of him. Genesis 39:2-3 says, "The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand." Stephen said about Joseph, "God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (Acts 7:9-10).

In later years, God was with the judges after Israel had taken the land of Canaan. Judges 2:18 says, "When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them."

David was a man after God's own heart. Though he suffered through many trials, "David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him" (1 Samuel 18:14). Second Samuel 5:10 says, "David became greater and greater, for the LORD God of hosts was with him." When God is with us, He blesses us and helps us through our struggles and challenges.

King Hezekiah "did right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done." Hezekiah "clung to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments." As a result, 2 Kings 18:7-8 says, "And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city." God blessed Hezekiah, because Hezekiah clung to the Lord and kept His commandments.

The Lord God said to Israel, "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). When we cling to God, He clings to us. James 4:7-8 says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

When God is with us, that doesn't mean we'll never suffer or be tempted. We all face trials, heartaches, and difficulties. Anyone who has read the stories of Joseph, David, or Hezekiah knows that their lives were not always easy. What God being "with" us does mean is that we are never alone in our temptations, our struggles, and our suffering. We look to God for our strength, our comfort, and our hope.

What happens when people forsake God and no longer have His blessing? I can think of a few illustrations. Do you remember Samson and Delilah? Samson's power came from God. As long as he observed God's ways, God was with him. Delilah wanted to know the source of Samson's strength. Judges 16:16-20 tells the story: "It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, 'A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man.' When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.' Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. She said, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' And he awoke from his

sleep and said, 'I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him." When his hair came off, Samson's favor with the Lord ceased. He could no longer defeat the Philistines. Thankfully, Samson's hair grew back. When Samson prayed, God restored his strength.

Scripture gives us more than one picture of God's view of Solomon. When Solomon first became king, 2 Chronicles 1:1 says, "Now Solomon the son of David established himself securely over his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him and exalted him greatly." But, Solomon's many wives led him astray. First Kings 11:6-9 says, "Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." He no longer pleased God because he loved his foreign wives.

The people of Judah, who were God's people, in later years turned away from God and followed Baal and other Canaanite gods. They believed that they could practice idolatry and immorality and still be right with God. Jeremiah 2:12-13 says, "'Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,' declares the LORD. 'For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.'" The Jews left the God who loved them for their worthless gods who were only man-made pieces of stone and wood. God said, "'Shall I not punish these people?' declares the LORD, 'On a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?' An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?" (Jeremiah 5:29-31).

We too must ask the question, if we have forsaken the Lord, what will we do at the end when God holds us responsible. Israel chose sin over righteousness and then they hardened their hearts against God. We must be careful to keep our hearts close to God. Jeremiah 6:15 says of Jerusalem, "'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." I see even in our own culture today, some who are never ashamed of immorality and don't know how to blush over their sins. This, my friend, is great weakness of the heart and the mind.

Hebrews 3:12-13 warns God's people, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The idea that Christians who turn from God cannot lose their souls is a myth. God urges us to stay faithful to Him and to continue worshiping with the church. Hebrews 10:25 says, "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."

Some have decided to forsake assembling with the church altogether, to forsake the Lord. Hebrews 10:26-31 says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of

the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The LORD will judge his people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

God has a track record of punishing those who forsake Him and lose all respect for what is good and right. We must not, as Jerusalem did in the days of Jeremiah, listen to the wrong people and take the grace of God for granted. The Jews hardened their hearts and refused to repent. God punished them. God will punish us too if we harden our hearts and refuse to repent. God is the God of grace, but He's also a holy and just God who punishes sin.

My friend, will you refuse the blessing of God so that you can live a worldly life without God? Would you gain the world but lose your soul? Will you stray from the truth? James 5:19-20 says, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Won't you return to God?

Most people know John 3:16, but do you know John 3:18? It says, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." You cannot expect God to be with you and bless you, if you do not believe and serve the Lord. According to Ephesians 2:12, people who are outside of Christ are "separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Yes, it matters whether you are with God or whether God is with you, or whether you're without God and God is not with you.

The Lord Jesus said, "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; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:23-24). Those whom God loves and with whom He makes His home are those who love Him and keep His commandments. Do you?

If you have the Lord with you in this life, you can live with the Lord in the life to come. Paul said, "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" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). If you wish to be at home with the Lord in eternity, then let the Lord make his home with you in this life.

To begin a relationship with the Lord, you must place your faith and your trust in Him. Believing in Jesus Christ is more than just acknowledging His existence; it means that you believe Him and in Him. You believe His words and His promises. You want to serve Him. You turn away from sinful things and begin living for the Lord—now that's repentance! With faith, and love, and a penitent heart, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, just as Acts 2:38 teaches.

## We Need Church

Many people think that you can be a good Christian without being a member of any church. Is church really necessary? Today, we're going to explore what God says about the church, and you can't afford to miss this study! We know the Lord's way is the best way, the right way, and the holy way of life. The best way to know the Lord's way is to study the Scriptures. They're God's voice to us today. They were true when the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets to write them, and they're true for all time.

When you mention the word "church," people respond in a multitude of ways. Some think of the church as optional. Some think of the church as an institution. Some think that the church is made up of prejudiced hypocrites. Some think the church needs reinventing in a style more like the culture of our times. Everyone seems to think they know what the church should be like. Even folks who have never read the Bible or haven't entered a church door in many years have an opinion about what the church should be.

You've probably noticed that religion in America has changed. Many groups have become religious entertainment venues, and others have become like shopping malls. Some think the primary purpose of the church is to cater to my wants and desires. We've become self-centered, thinking Jesus ought to be our servant rather than thinking we ought to be His. It's no wonder some see the church as optional and others as a waste of time. Few want to know what Christ envisioned for the church that He built or what place it has in His heart. The Lord never thought of the church as an option; in His eyes it's necessary.

Our reading today comes from Acts 20:28-32. Paul is here addressing the elders of the church in Ephesus. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each 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." Let's pray together. O Father, we are grateful that Your Word protects us and gives us the truths that we need to be right with You and to avoid foolish things. Father, we pray that Your Word and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

Yes, the Lord Jesus considered the church as necessary. He wants everyone to be a member of His church and to worship with the church regularly. The idea that you can be a good Christian and not be a member of the church is not from the heart of God. When you take a close look at your Bible, the New Testament reveals that the church is quite necessary to our relationship with the Lord.

The church that Jesus built doesn't belong to you or to me; it belongs to the Lord. He built it. After Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (that is, the confession Peter made) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). Yes, Jesus built His church, and not even His death could prevent it.

The church belongs to the Lord because He purchased it. The apostle Paul, by inspiration, told the elders of the church at Ephesus, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased

with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). If Jesus loved the church enough to die for it, how can we think so little of it? The church must be precious to the Lord.

The Bible reveals how closely related Christ is to the church in Ephesians 1:22-23. The Bible says, “And He (that is, God) put all things in subjection under His feet (that is, Jesus’ feet), and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Just as your head is inseparably connected to your body, so Christ is inseparably connected to the church. Just as your body does your will as is conceived in the brain, so the church does the will of its head, and that’s Jesus Christ. The church is the fullness of Christ. We must never, never separate Christ from His church or the church from Christ.

The church is extremely precious to the Lord; He considers the church as His bride. The Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus has gone to great lengths to bless and to sanctify the church. He wants her to be radiant with glory. Jesus values the church that much.

When people slander the church or make it trivial, they mock and insult Jesus Christ. They’re saying that Jesus is foolish to sanctify and glorify the church. If you wish to make a man angry, just slander his wife. Do you think the Lord Jesus will look kindly on anyone who slanders His bride?

I want to distinguish the church that the Lord Jesus calls His bride from what people today think when they hear the word “church.” What I’m speaking about is the Lord’s church described in the New Testament. Many religious groups who call themselves “churches” are nothing like the New Testament church. They differ in their name, in their organization, in their doctrine, in their mission, and in their worship. They’re often a reflection of our culture more than what God intended for the church to be. Some groups have so little spiritual value and content, it’s no wonder that people see it as unnecessary.

This difference of what we see today and what the Bible teaches confuses and causes people to stray from the will of God. More than ever, people need to know the truth revealed in God’s Word about the church. They need to think clearly about what God desires rather than be pulled into a false hope by something that calls itself church but differs greatly from the church that Jesus built as found in the New Testament. The Scriptures clearly make the church that Jesus built a necessity for us to engage in if we wish to please God.

Why is the church so necessary? There are several reasons. First, the Lord adds those that He saves to His church. When the Jews at Pentecost heard Peter preach, they were pierced to the heart and they wanted to know what to do. Peter replied that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Acts 2:41 says, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” In verse 47 the Bible says, “And the Lord was adding to their number (that is, to the church) day by day those who were being saved.” The Lord forgives us at baptism and adds us to His church. Baptism was that time that they were forgiven or saved.

When a person is saved, the Lord adds him to His church. To be in the church means the Lord has saved you. The Scriptures never contemplate a person who is saved as a person who hasn’t been baptized or a person who is not in the Lord’s church. The apostle Paul told the church at Colossae, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). Just



as the Lord grants forgiveness when one repents and is baptized, so the Lord adds the baptized to His church. The church is the kingdom of Christ!

When John wrote to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 1, he revealed to them what Christ had done for them. The Bible says, “Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—and to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:4-6).

The book of Revelation addresses people who had come into a kingdom and were priests to God. John taught that “we” Christians “are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). There are but two kingdoms: the domain of darkness and the kingdom of His beloved Son. To enter the church is to enter the kingdom of the beloved Son.

The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of the church as a kingdom. The Lord said, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (that is, his confession) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19). Why would the Lord build one thing and then give Peter keys to something else if the church is not the Kingdom? He doesn’t do that. The church is the kingdom of God today.

Some may ask, Phil, how do you know that? In Acts 20:28, the Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. We have no record anywhere in the New Testament that the blood of Jesus ever purchased anything but the church. The twenty-four elders, however, sang this new song to the Lord Jesus, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10). The same blood didn’t purchase two different things, no—the church is that blood-bought kingdom.

Second, being in the church means that you’re blood-bought, but there’s no promise of being blood-bought to those outside the church. The church contains the cleansed, but the others outside are still in sin. The kingdom contains priests to God, but outside there are no priests to God. The Bible says, “Whoever has the Son has life; but whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12) Being in the Lord’s church is vital to our eternal salvation.

Ephesians chapter 2 contrasts the difference between people who are in the world and outside of Christ from those who come into Christ and His church. The apostle Paul reminds those who came out of paganism at Ephesus of what they had before they became members of the church, or body of Christ. Ephesians 2:12-13 says, “remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off, you’ve been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

In verses 19 to 22, Paul describes them after they became Christians, and he says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you’re fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household (His family), having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling

of God in the Spirit.” Before, they were strangers without hope and without God. Now, they’re God’s family and fellow citizens in God’s kingdom, the church.

Third, the church is necessary because being in the church means that you are a member of God’s family. Paul told Timothy, “but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household (that is, the family) of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). In this passage Paul identified the church as God’s household or family. The children of God are in the church. If you claim to be in God’s family but say church membership is unnecessary, then you’re confused and may be deceiving yourself.

The very act that puts you into the family of God is what puts one into the church. Compare these two verses. First, Galatians 3:26-27, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Baptism as an act of faith and is what makes us children of God. Second, consider 1 Corinthians 12:13, which says “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” This verse says that we are baptized into the body. Ephesians 1:22-23 taught us that the body of Christ is the church. So, baptism is what makes one a child of God, and baptism is what puts us into the body of Christ, and that is the church.

When we realize the church is God’s family, it’s the bride of Christ; it’s the body of Christ; it is the saved; it is those that were bought by the blood of Jesus, then we can see why the church is so important in God’s eyes. Being a member of the Lord’s church is not optional. Let me ask you, are you a member of the church that Jesus built? It matters! Let’s pray together. O Father, we’re so thankful for Your family, the church. We’re thankful for the Kingdom, for the body of Christ, for the bride of Christ, the church. And, Father, help us to be devoted to You, and to give ourselves so that we might serve You and please You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren’t active. They’ve stopped worshiping at church or supporting it. By their actions they’ve actually abandoned the church and in that sense they’ve abandoned the Lord. The Bible says, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). The Lord wants us to encourage each other to love and good works and not forsake assembling with other Christians. You can’t encourage other Christians to stay faithful if you quit going to church altogether.

I know some of you can’t attend worship because of your health. The Lord understands your situation. But if you can attend, yet choose to forsake meeting with the Lord’s church, you’re forsaking the Lord, too. The Lord loves His people and knows His church. If you quit serving Him, He knows it. When you stop attending, you also open the door to temptation of every kind. To stay spiritually healthy, stay in church.

To become a member of the church and to be saved, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; repent of your sins; confess Jesus Christ as the son of God; and be baptized. When you’re baptized, the blood of Jesus will wash away your sins; he’ll cause you to be added to the church. You’ll become a child of God, born again into His family. If you are a member of the church of Christ but you’ve stopped attending, my friend, why not come back to the Lord and to the church. Get right with God and do it today.

## "You Can Understand the Bible"

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time and comes today in hundreds of languages. Some think the Bible is too hard to understand. Is it really? God's way is always a blessing. God loves us and He gave us His will in written form in the Bible so that every age and nation could know the truth and be saved. God wants every person to believe and to obey His will.

Some people think the Bible is just too hard to understand. Perhaps you've heard people say, "The Bible is not meant to be understood." Or, "The Bible says different things to different people." Or, "What is important is not so much what the Bible says but what the Bible says to me." I've heard people claim, "The New Testament addressed the culture of the first century but really doesn't speak to us today."

Others dismiss God's Word by saying, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere and love Jesus." Then there's the skeptic who says, "You can make the Bible say anything you want it to say." Some say, "You just take a passage of Scripture and you read it to a group of people and there'll be as many interpretations of that passage as there are people in the room."

These popular charges against the Bible lose sight of God's purpose in giving us His Word. They seem to forget about God's incredible desire to have a relationship with us that lasts for an eternity. That relationship means that we can know Him and know His will. The Lord Jesus promised, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Our reading today comes from the opening words of The Gospel According to Luke 1:1-4. "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." Is the Bible meant to be understood? The answer is yes, but don't take my word for it. Let's see what the Bible has to say for itself. Psalm 19:8 says, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:125 says, "I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies." Psalm 119:130 says, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." Proverbs 6:23 says, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life."

When people say the Bible is not meant to be understood, I wonder how they came to that conclusion. Did they get it from the Bible or from other people? Surprisingly, some churches don't want you to read your Bible. These churches worry that if you read your Bible, you'll find out what the Bible actually says and that it's different from what they teach and practice. The Bible has God's authority attached to it, and it challenges those who vary from it.

The apostle Paul warned in Scripture about this kind of problem, and even in his day there were people who were misusing and tampering with God's Word. The Bible says, "But we

have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2-4).

The devil will do anything, anything to keep people from understanding the truth of God's Word. He'd love nothing more than to blind people to the gospel so they won't know the truth. Satan will tamper with the Word to convince you to believe something that's only partially true. He realizes his message must sound true or you won't buy into it. If he tells a lie that sounds true, he might lead some folks astray. If he can make his lie really appealing, he will. But when people obey the lie rather than listen to God, they're deceived with a counterfeit religion. The devil has supplied plenty of counterfeits in our world today.

We wouldn't know what the truth is and what error is if it weren't for this permanent standard of truth in the Bible. The Word of God provides that standard of truth for all time. God's Word is settled in heaven and it doesn't change. It's this stability, this security, this solid foundation that allows Christians to remain united to God. God was wise to give His message to mankind in written form in the Bible because by giving us the Bible, we can know the truth which makes us free. The difference between Christ's true disciples and other people is that true disciples remain in the Word of God, while the others drift away from the Word.

So, we must stay with God's Word. God expected ancient Israelite parents to teach their children the Law of God. The Lord God was concerned that a generation might arise that didn't know His commandments. So, Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you're going over the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 31:10-13.)

If the Bible were so hard to understand, God wouldn't have commanded all Israel to go through this every seven years. Truly, we can understand the Bible. The Bible says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). God gave us His Word to bless us.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 explains, "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It's not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It's in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." God not only wants us to understand it, He also expects us to love and obey it.

The Word of God went out to all Israel. There were all kinds of people listening. There were the people who might be wise, and then there were the naïve; there were people who

were conservative, and people who were liberal; there were people who were educated, the young, and the old. Those who didn't know God's Law were expected to learn the Law and obey it. My friend, you're not an exception. God expects you to know His will.

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 doesn't communicate in riddles, nor does He hold back some secret message for only the select few. Oh, no! God wants everyone to be able to know the truth, to be saved, and to live in heaven with Him. The Bible says in Hebrews 2:9 that Jesus tasted death for every person. Why then would God give us a Bible with the words of life, but give it in a way that we couldn't understand it? That's ridiculous.

When God inspired Luke to write one of the four gospel accounts, He chose this Greek Gentile to write to a Roman authority about Jesus Christ, a Jew. Luke didn't grow up knowing about God, and Theophilus had only heard bits and pieces; so here is what the inspired 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 that you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

Theophilus apparently wanted to know the truth, and Luke said that he could tell him with certainty (that is, exact knowledge) the things concerning Jesus Christ. The Bible was written to impart to us true knowledge, exact knowledge, and the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The apostle John said, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). God gave us this book, the Bible, so that we might believe in Jesus Christ and be saved and have life in His name. I cannot imagine why, if this is the purpose of the Bible, that God would write something that nobody can understand. The fact is we can understand what we need to know to be saved and go to heaven and to live with God forever!

In the book of Acts, the Bible says, "And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:2-4). The Scripture is not some strange riddle, but it's a book that gives life and tells the marvelous story of Jesus Christ.

From this inspired book, we learn the most wonderful story of love and sacrifice. To some it may be meaningless, but to us it's the most meaningful story in the entire world. I'm so thankful that God chose men and inspired them to write that story down in the first century so that we could hear it, and we could read it as it really happened, and could believe and obey it. The New Testament gives us eyewitness accounts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, a story of good news that saves our souls. There simply is no better, no more important, no more meaningful story in the entire world.

The gospel provides God's power unto salvation to everyone who believes it, according to Romans 1:16. God knew that He had to reveal Himself to mankind if they were to know and believe in Him and find salvation. We also can know some things through observing the universe, but we can't know the full story; we can't know it apart from the Word of God. The Bible says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, then God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). If we want to know the precious truth about God, we must go to His Word. Our task is to hear it, believe it, love it, obey it, and share it with others. Oh, thank God for the Bible!

The apostle Paul said, "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you'll understand until the end" (2 Corinthians 1:13). Paul wrote no other thing but what the Corinthians could understand; and we too can understand the Bible.

In fact, we must understand the Word of God and obey it. Why? Because one day we will be judged by the Word of God. The Lord Jesus said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word that I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). My friend, you and I will be judged one day by the Words that are written in this book. We will stand before God and we'll have to give an account for our lives, and the standard will be these written Words.

The Lord Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21). We must know what the will of God is. The purest source of God's will is found in the New Testament. So don't settle for anything less than the Scriptures. They will lead you to an exact knowledge of the Lord's will. And they will give you the unfailing truth that leads to eternal life. What kind of God says, "I'm going to judge you by the things written in the books" (Revelation 20:11-15 and John 12:48), but then gives us a book that people can't understand? Wouldn't such a God be a monster? But our God isn't like that. He gives us a book so that we can understand. Our God loves us and wants all men to be saved and to know the truth. Shouldn't we strive to know His will? If knowing and doing the will of God is the difference between eternal life and death, can we afford to ignore what He says?

The apostle Paul said, "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). God wants us to study the Bible so that we will know the truth and not be ashamed on the Day of Judgment because we didn't follow the teaching of the Bible. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding."

I hope you'll follow those teachings and that you'll come to Christ. To hear the Words of Christ and believe them is a part of what it means to come to Him. Do that; repent of your sins and confess the name of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Repentance means that you change your heart; you leave sin and you turn to the ways of God. So with love and faith and repentance, be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins as Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 teach. The baptism of Christ is an immersion. When you do, God will bless you with His grace and forgiveness and add you to His church. He'll make you His child and give you an inheritance with Him. My friend, won't you do that? Won't you do it today?

## Giving Thanks

The mark of a real Christian is love, the love that grows out of thanksgiving. Today, we're exploring our need to give thanks. The Bible teaches us what God has done for us and how He's blessed us every day of our lives. Paul realized that "In him we live and move and have our being"; and "we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:28). God provides everything we need physically and spiritually to live godly lives filled with good works.

William Law, in his book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, said, "Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is more eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God who wills everything that God wills, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it."

One temptation of the maturing Christian is the danger of getting accustomed to his blessings. Like the traveler who has been everywhere and seen everything, the maturing Christian is in danger of taking his blessings for granted and getting so accustomed to them that they fail to excite him as they once did. Emerson said that if the stars came out only once a year, everybody would stay up all night to behold them. I fear we've seen the stars so often we don't bother to look at them. We've grown accustomed to our blessings.

Psalm 92:1-2 says, "It is good to give thanks to the LORD And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning And Your faithfulness by night." Are you thankful?

Our scripture reading today comes from Psalm 103:1-5. This is a psalm of David talking about all the good that God has done.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle.

Psalm 100:4 says, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name." This is really what those who love God enjoy doing. Giving thanks takes place when people think about all the good that God has done. In the old Anglo-Saxon tongue, thankfulness means "thoughtfulness"; thinking of all that God's goodness gives to us and how it draws forth from our heart's gratitude. When we count our blessings, we begin to realize all the good God has made possible for us. 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." Yes, every good thing is from our God!

The Christian life should be full of thanksgiving. Paul wrote, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:15-17). Gratitude for the Lord leads us to forgive others, to sing from our hearts, and to serve the Lord Jesus.

When people fail to respect and thank God, they give their lives to things that can do them no good. Nothing substitutes for God. Romans 1:18-23 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and His divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." Those who forget God settle for useless idols and futile speculations. Without God, there is no hope.

Don't forget all the good things that He has done for you. Moses warned the Israelites not to forget God after they entered the Promised Land. He said, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 8:10-14).

The book of Judges tells the sad story of a generation that lost sight of God and had to be disciplined. Judges 2:7 tells of the faithfulness of the people during the lifetime of Joshua: "The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work which the LORD had done for Israel." However, verse ten tells what happened later: "All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; (that is, the generation of Joshua) and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel."

The later generation "did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers" according to verses eleven and twelve. Judges 2:14 says, "The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed." When we forget the Lord, we put our lives and our souls into jeopardy. God raised up judges to deliver them from the hand of their enemies, but they wouldn't listen to the judges and they turned quickly away from the Lord back to the idols.

On the other hand, Job held fast to God even when he suffered great anguish. According to Job, chapter one, Job suffered the loss of seven sons and three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants. He was the greatest of all the men of the east. Job 1:20-22 says, "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken



away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.' And through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."

In chapter two, Job suffered a terrible disease that caused boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job didn't understand why this happened, but he did not give up his faith in God. When his wife told him to curse God and die, Job said, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. We all face adversity, but we should never forget the good that God gives to us.

What does God do for us? Let's count our blessings. First, we should be thankful we are not where we were spiritually. Salvation is no small gift. Paul realized what it means to be saved from sin. He said, "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 6:17-18). On a very personal level, Paul knew how important it was to be saved from sin. He said, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). Without Jesus, we could never be free from sin's control and destiny.

Second, we should be thankful we have a Savior who loves us and is interceding for us. First Timothy 2:5-6 says, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time." Jesus not only died for us; He serves as our mediator with God the Father and makes intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Third, we should be thankful we have a Father in heaven to bless and help us. The Lord Jesus 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. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33). God will take care of us!

Fourth, we should be thankful the Lord gives us strength. Isaiah 40:28-31 says, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. 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."

Fifth, we should be thankful that our names are written in heaven. Luke 10:17-20 says, "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'" He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." Even a miracle is not as great a blessing as knowing that our names are recorded in heaven. This is our hope.

Sixth, we should be thankful we have victory over death. Because Jesus arose from the dead, we have hope in our bodily resurrection. Paul wrote, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the

imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:50-56).

Seventh, we should be thankful that we have an inheritance in heaven. Jesus went to the Father in heaven to prepare a place for us. First Peter 1:3-5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Yes, we have an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. We serve a great and loving God.

Let's praise God and thank Him for all His blessings. Thanksgiving is the foundation of our love for God. Psalm 30:4-5 says, "Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning."

Don't let a single day, not even a single day, pass without giving thanks to God for His love, His grace, and His blessing! Without God we have no hope; but with God in our lives, we have every hope and promise. We can rejoice in His love. We can face the future with confidence, because God walks with us. He walks with us every step we take. Make this day and every day a day of thanksgiving! And never, never forget what God has done for you.

Leslie Flynn tells the story about a farmer in Vermont. He was sitting on the porch with his wife. He was thinking about how much she meant to him. It was about time—for they had lived together for forty-two years; and she had been such a help, a willing hard worker. One day as they sat together, he said, "Wife, you've been such a wonderful woman that I can hardly keep from telling you." I'm sure it would mean much to her if he had regularly told her how much he loved and valued her as a wife. Should we be like this thankless farmer and forget how good God has been to us?

You know everyone likes to hear, "thank you." Some people are kinder to the store clerk than they are to their families; they hardly say "thank you" to their families. Others are kinder to the store clerk than they are to God, because they rarely if ever pray, study the Bible, or attend worship. Some rarely think about God or respect His words. When people live more like the world than they do the Lord, their hearts are far from God. If you're grateful to God, say so! If you're grateful to God, show it!

Gratitude for the cross of Christ, revealed in the gospel, calls us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross daily, and to follow the Lord Jesus. Love calls us to believe and trust the Lord and His teaching, to turn away from sin and evil, to confess our faith in Jesus Christ, and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Baptism into Christ washes away our sins, and adds us to the church, and makes us children of God.