

# *Program Transcripts*

**For December 2019**



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



# SEARCH PROGRAMS

December 2019

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **DECEMBER 1 – TRUST GOD**

In a world filled with doubt, it's comforting to know there is Someone we can trust. Thankfully, God is utterly trustworthy for many reasons. Let's put our trust in God and keep Him close to our hearts.

## **DECEMBER 8 – SACRED AND PROFANE**

The word "holy" seems to have vanished from the minds of many. Things we used to hold as sacred are treated as if they were common and ordinary. Let's renew our commitment to treat God as holy.

## **DECEMBER 15 – THE DEVIL'S SCHEMES**

You have an enemy who wants to ruin your life and cause you eternal harm. The devil is no fool; he has many schemes and strategies to keep your soul from God. We must know our enemy, Satan.

## **DECEMBER 22 – THE GIFT OF LOVE**

When God sent His Son Jesus into the world, He was sending His very heart filled with love. We must remember God's gift of love in Christ Jesus our Lord. We must learn to give God our love in return.

## **DECEMBER 29 – PRAY WITHOUT CEASING**

From time to time we must all reenroll in the school of prayer. Prayerlessness often leaves our souls weak and weary. To be truly strong spiritually we must continue to ask, seek, and knock.

## Trust God

In a world filled with doubt, it's comforting to know there is Someone we can trust. My friend, you can trust God. God's way is always the best way to live.

A college girl once talked with her preacher and said, "I have never trusted anyone in my life. How can I trust the Lord Jesus Christ with my problems?" It was spring, and the girl was going home for a break. The preacher asked her how she was traveling. She said, "I am going to fly." "Do you have a ticket?" he asked. "No," she said, "I have to find out what time I can get a plane." "How are you going to do that?" he inquired. She said, "I'm calling the airline to find out the time and reserve a seat on that plane. Then my friend will take me to the airport and I'll board the plane." He said, "Do you know the reservation clerk at the airline?" "No, I don't." "And your friend is going to take you to the airport, trusting the information of this unknown clerk?" "Yes." "Do you know the pilot of the plane?" "No, I don't." "Then you're going to trust your friend to drive you to the airport. You're going to trust some unknown clerk at the airline office to reserve your seat on that flight. Then you're going to take your seat in an airliner flown by a pilot that you don't know, trusting him to get you home. My dear, that's a lot of trust."

When you put your life, your soul, and your problems in the hand of the Lord, you put them into the hand of someone who knows and loves you very much. You can trust the Lord, who died and rose again on your behalf.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 37:3-7, where David talks about his reason for trusting in God.

Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

David tells of his faith in God and how he could wait patiently and trust in Him.

To trust means to rely on the integrity, power, or ability of someone or something to do what He or it promises. We buy products with a guarantee or a warranty, so we may have the assurance the product will do what we need or desire. We place our trust in people, believing that person has the ability and the integrity to keep his word.

God expects His people to trust Him. The Lord told Noah to build an ark, but Noah had never seen rain. Noah obeyed God and saved his family. God called Abraham "to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham trusted God, and God trusted Abraham. God asked Joshua and the Israelites to walk around the city of Jericho for seven days. If they followed His instructions, God said He would cause the walls to fall down flat. Hebrews 11:30 says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days."

Trusting God involves at least four things. First, it involves dependence upon the Almighty. We must rely on God to do the things that we cannot do for ourselves. We're simply human beings, wholly dependent upon God for life and for our very being. Without God, we could do nothing. 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.” God promises to hear the prayers of His children. The Lord Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you” (Mark 11:24). Our Father answers prayer and He cares for His children. Some want to be completely self-reliant, never needing anyone; but we all need help at some point in our lives.

Second, trusting God involves risk. Some things we know and some things we don't know; some things we can do and some we can't. Now and then, we must put ourselves into God's hands. The apostle Paul suffered many things, including imprisonment. Shortly before his death, he wrote, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). Paul placed his soul into the hands of God. People may be able to take your life, but they cannot take your soul. When you become a Christian, you belong to the Lord, body, soul, and spirit. Do you trust God with your soul?

Third, trusting God involves courage. Serving God means finding the courage to do what is right, even when no one else will. The Bible tells of David's courage when Goliath challenged the army of Israel. David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands” (1 Samuel 17:45-47). By faith, David defeated Goliath that day.

Fourth, trusting God involves commitment. Biblical faith is never just an intellectual matter; faith always acts. Trust demonstrates itself. It overcomes the fear by relying on God. Trust walks forward with hope and confidence that God is ever present, ever watching, and ever helping. David wrote, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7). When life presses against us, we hold fast to God. When the world mistreats us, we call upon God for help.

You might ask why should we trust God? That's an important question and it deserves our time. First, we can trust God because we know His character. God always keeps His promises! As an old man and battling the Canaanites for many years, Joshua could proclaim, “Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:45). God keeps His promises because God does not lie! Titus 1:2 speaks of “God, who cannot lie.” The Bible repeatedly says God is faithful! Paul reassured the church at Thessalonica, “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3). We can take heart because God never abandons His people. Psalm 9:10 says, “Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.” God's character alone makes Him utterly trustworthy.

Second, we can trust God because He is wise. God sees and knows things that we cannot

see and know. When something happens that we don't understand, we mustn't give up. God can see things we can't. God isn't limited in His understanding like we are. Psalm 147:5 says, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite." God sees and knows the future! God Himself reminds us, "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9-10). What seems a mystery to us is often clear to God. We must trust that He will do what is right and good.

Third, we can trust God because we know that He is powerful. God can do things we cannot do. The Lord Jesus said, "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). Paul told the church at Philippi, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). We trust God because He has shown us time and again what He is able to do for us.

Fourth, we can trust God because we are assured by His love. God will always do what is best for us because He loves us. He may not do what we want when we want it; but He will do what is best for us in the long run. God will be with us through every storm, every drought, every hurt, every struggle, every trial, and every problem. In a time of persecution, Paul said to the Roman Christians, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39). Yes, we can rejoice in the love of God!

When you trust God, there are some things trust will do for you and help you. First, trusting God will help you realize that the whole world is not on your shoulders. God has been running this world a long time. He will continue to uphold all things by His power. In a time of great stress, Peter urged Christians to cast "all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). The psalmist David, writing by inspiration, said, "Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken" (Psalm 55:22).

Second, trusting God will help us understand that God will see us through today's struggles. Psalm 37:5-6 says, "Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday." Christians trust God to make things right, to heal what is broken, and to give them strength when they're weak. We may not be able to see how things will work out, but God can make it happen. The Bible teaches, "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" (Proverbs 3:5-7). God will help us when we trust Him enough to do what He teaches.

Third, trusting God will help us realize that when physical life is harsh we can still say it is well with my soul. Psalm 125:1 teaches, "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever." We may lose many things, but we're secure if our souls are in God's hands. In 1874, the French steamer, *Ville de Havre*, on a

return trip from America, collided with the a sailing vessel and sank in half an hour. Mrs. H. G. Spafford and her four children were aboard that steamer. All four children were drowned, and only Mrs. Spafford survived. She sent a two word message to her husband in Chicago, "Saved Alone." For over a year, the grieving couple agonized over the accident. Two years later, Mr. Spafford wrote a song in commemoration of the death of his children. He wrote, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll— Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul.'"

Why am I talking about these matters? When I preach at a church, I take notice that the pews have people whose hearts are aching, whose lives are difficult, and who need the comfort and the reassurance of our loving and Almighty God. From the letters that I receive, I realize many of you are facing heartaches, physical problems, family struggles, and crushing financial burdens. The prophet Isaiah said this about God, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3). How badly we all need perfect peace, the comfort and assurance that the Lord is with us! We all cry out for God to hear us and to help us through the struggles that we face, and He will help us!

David wrote, "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear, And will trust in the LORD. How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust, And has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood" (Psalm 40:1-4).

Every time we see how God has helped a brother or sister, it ought to reassure our hearts that God will help us, too. My friend, trust, trust, trust in God because He is our hope!

The Lord Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). The Lord's way is not impossible. He gives us a bearable yoke and a light burden. He wants to help us live righteous and productive lives.

When you trust in God, your life will begin to change. You'll be able to say as Nahum did, "The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him" (Nahum 1:7). God wants a close relationship with you, a relationship built on trust and love. God will bless and care for you if you will trust in Him. The Bible says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Become a Christian by putting your trust in Christ. Let Him know that He is your Lord. Trusting Jesus means following His teaching. Trust will lead you to abandon what the Lord calls sin and to follow after righteousness. With your trusting faith and loving repentance, confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized, the Lord washes away your sins (Acts 22:16); He makes you His child (Galatians 3:26-27); and He adds you to His church. Once you become a Christian, continue to live with faith and trust in God. Don't ever give up on God!

## Sacred and Profane

The word “holy” seems to have vanished from the minds of many. Today, we’re going to explore the holiness of God. God is God, and we are His creatures. The Lord created us; and He now gives us life and sustains us. We owe our very existence to the One who is wiser than we are, the One who is more powerful than we are, and the One who loved us enough to send His Son to die for our sins. The Lord, on the last day, will hold us accountable for our thoughts, our words, and our actions. For all these reasons, we must set Him apart as Lord in our hearts and lives. We should please Him in every way.

What does the word “holy” mean, and why should it matter? To be holy means to be set apart and devoted to the Lord in holiness and purity. The Lord God Himself said to Israel, “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am Holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine” (Leviticus 20:26). God is holy, and He wants His people to live holy lives that show that they belong to Him. Sadly, many claim to belong to God, but live unholy lives.

The New Testament uses the word “holy” more than 200 times. It speaks of the Holy Spirit, Jesus as the Holy One of God, the Holy or sacred Scriptures, holy angels, holy ground, the holy place, holy prophets, and even Christians as a holy nation in 1 Peter 2:9. To be made holy means we are set apart and devoted to God. If you’re a Christian, isn’t it important to you to be holy and to be righteous?

Our reading today comes from the prophet Isaiah 6:1-7.

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth *with it* and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”

That’s a reading from God’s Holy Word.

Isaiah understood, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.” I wonder as we stand before Him, if we too see ourselves as God sees us. Isaiah the prophet saw himself as one with unclean lips and needing the grace and forgiveness of God. He saw the holiness and purity of God and came to realize that sin had ruined him. Isaiah knew the difference between being holy and being in sin.

For several years, I’ve watched with sadness a serious decline in our respect for that which is sacred. The foundation of reverence for God, for morality, for life, for family, and for truth has disappeared from the hearts of many. We no longer realize some things are bigger and more important than ourselves; we’ve begun to believe that we don’t have to give an account to God on the last day. This loss of the sense of the sacred has even infected the church.

Some Christians speak and sing of the awesome nature of God but fail to distinguish the

sacred from the profane. To many, words like “sacred” and “profane” seem distant and belong to another age; but the Lord God has always distinguished that which is holy from that which is common. One of the Ten Commandments reads, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). God is Holy, and His name is Holy. To take His name in vain means that one has failed to take the name of the Lord seriously but to treat it as a trivial thing. When people treat the name of God as something trivial, and swear falsely by it, or defile the character and holiness of God, they have sinned against Him.

The Lord God takes it personally when people misuse His name. Leviticus 19:2 says, “You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.” In ancient times, people would make a vow to the Lord hastily and fail to keep their vows. So Solomon said, “When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It’s better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7).

When we approach God to worship Him, we should approach Him with reverence and awe. Worship is not entertainment or trivial. Sometimes I hear people say, “I didn’t get much out of worship.” Worship is not about us; worship is about the glory of God. Worship is an act of love, praise, respect, adoration, and thanksgiving. When people sincerely worship in spirit and in truth, they glorify God. When they glorify the God they love, they are themselves blessed by the experience of coming close to God.

When Nadab and Abihu failed to worship God appropriately, but offered up strange fire which the Lord had not commanded, “fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD” (Leviticus 10:1-2). God is Holy, and He wants His people to worship Him in the way He commanded. When people offer up strange worship, worship He did not command, He is offended.

Moses explained to Aaron, about Nadab and Abihu; Aaron was, of course, the high priest and the father of these two men; Moses said, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, (that is, made holy) and before all the people I will be glorified’” (Leviticus 10:3). Worship is a sacred act, because God is sacred. We can’t presume that we can offer any old thing to God and He’ll be pleased. Hebrews 12:28-29 says, “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” We must worship in spirit and in truth; we must distinguish the holy from the profane.

When we worship our Holy God, we must please the One we worship. To call what we do “worship” but focus on ourselves and what we want must surely appear to God as empty and vain. When the priests in the days of Malachi offered up polluted and blemished offerings at the temple, the Lord felt despised and profaned (Malachi 1:8-14). They were entreating the favor of the Lord but not honoring him as a “great King.” God demands that His name be “feared among the nations” and that His people offer a “pure offering.”

When churches ignore Scripture and offer what they wish rather than a “pure offering,” they too despise the Lord and fail to honor His name. They blemish the worship when they add



unauthorized musical instruments or have women preachers, things never instructed in the New Testament for the church. When people at church imitate performers on a stage, they take the focus off of God and put it on the performer. When churches today ignore God and profane His name by presuming to worship as they please, they fail to see God's attitude: "I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand" (Malachi 1:10).

The Scriptures also describe what being holy as God's children means in our moral lives. We must set ourselves apart from the lusts of the world. First Peter 1:13-16 says, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

People tend to do what they want rather than what they ought to do. They follow their passions rather than their consciences. First John 2:15-17 reminds us, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." In spite of what we hear daily from the world, God does have some moral absolutes. This world is passing away with its lusts. When our lust causes us to love the world, we do not love the Father as we should. God is not pleased.

God wants total commitment from us. He wants us to love Him with all our heart and soul. Paul urged the church in Rome, where so much idolatry and immorality existed, to give themselves completely, body, soul and spirit, to the Lord. He said, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2). When I give my body as a sacrifice to God, I can no longer live for its lusts and desires.

Living an unholy life is not an option for the Christian who wants to please God and live in His grace. Hebrews 12:14-16 says, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal." We too can lose the grace and blessing of God if we pursue sinful things and forget God.

Yes, a Christian can lose his salvation if he returns to a sinful life. Second Peter 2:20-21 says, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them (those defilements) and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them." Right and wrong matters! When people leave God's teaching and are overcome by sin, they end up worse than before they became a Christian.

Giving in to sin can confuse and mislead us. Sin can cause us to think less of God and then to begin justifying our sins. People can convince themselves that sin is good and living to

please God is unnecessary. Justifying sin can cause us to lose sight of anything godly or holy. We can lose sight of a pure and righteous God who expects us to be pure and righteous. We can fix our desires on our pleasures rather than on eternity. We can forget that one day we'll give an account for how we've lived.

Romans 2:6-11 says God "will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."

Until we realize our Holy God doesn't compromise His righteousness, we won't understand what it truly means that God is Holy. Habakkuk 1:13 says God's "eyes are too pure to approve evil"; and He "cannot look on wickedness with favor." Psalm 5:4 says we do not have "a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with" Him. How could we say God is just and righteous, if He does not condemn and punish evil?

In Psalm 50:16-21, God says to the wicked, "What right have you to tell of My statutes And to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate with adulterers. You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes." One day God will hold each of us accountable for our attitudes, our words, and our deeds. We will have no doubts about the holiness of God on that day. Wouldn't it be better to take God seriously? Wouldn't it be better to respect and obey Him?

Second Corinthians 6:17-7:1 says, "'Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'and do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a Father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." If you love the Lord, serve Him with all your heart and soul. Please Him in every way because you have given yourself to Him.

You ask, "How do we become children of God?" Any approach to God must include faith. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Any approach to God must also include repentance, the denying of ourselves through putting away the old sinful ways and taking up our crosses to follow the Lord by pursuing righteousness and holiness.

Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism puts us into Christ and clothes us with Christ. You aren't a child of God, and have not acted in faith until you have clothed yourself with Christ in baptism. When Paul speaks of a Christian who has faith, he never doubts this person has been baptized. Jesus said that one must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven in John 3:3-7. Have you believed? Have you repented? Have you been baptized?

## The Devil's Schemes

You have an enemy who wants to ruin your life and cause you eternal harm. Today, we're exploring some of the devil's schemes. The Scriptures not only teach us what is good and right, they also warn us about the spiritual dangers of sin and the efforts of the tempter to lead us to sin. The wages of sin is still death, and we must learn how our enemy, the devil, works to lead us into error and to immoral behavior. If we listen to the devil, we can be led astray and fall into sin.

First Peter 5:8-9 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Satan is cunning, deceptive, and he's your adversary. He "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). So, we must consider how the devil works. Satan loves to create doubt in God and in His Word; he will go so far as to contradict God. To those who fall to his schemes, he provides an alternative that he says is better! But, what Satan offers is cruel, sinful, and destructive. He is not your friend!

Satan wants you to love the world. First John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." His schemes to lead you astray and take your soul are many.

**Our reading today comes from Genesis 3:1-7.** We learn how sin came into the world.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

In dealing with Adam and Eve, Satan was deceptive, seductive, and selfish. The devil plants doubt in the place of faith. When it comes to truth, Satan asks "Indeed has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" He does everything he can to plant doubt in God's Word. When God speaks, the devil says, "maybe" and "perhaps." He says everything is relative. Satan wants everything anybody wants. But when God tells us the truth, Satan says, "Oh, we can't know that!" The devil says there are no absolute truths, and people can fall for it. Sometimes we need to ask, "Can you be absolutely sure there are no absolutes?" If you're absolutely sure, then there are absolutes! Satan loves to create doubt because he doesn't want us to take God seriously. He arrogantly sits in judgment of God and of God's Word.

Second, the devil will tell bold lies. The Lord Jesus told some Jews who refused to believe in Him, "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in

him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). When the devil told Eve, “You will surely not die,” he was lying, contradicting what God said in order to take life from Adam and Eve.

The devil loves to make false promises. He told Eve that when she ate of the fruit she would become like God, knowing good and evil. Instead, her sin against God caused her to lose access to the Garden of Eden and to the tree of life. She knew good and evil, but that didn't make her like God, for God is Holy. The devil will tell you that all kinds of sinful practices are good for you and pleasing; but they in time will hurt you and your loved ones.

Third, the devil is an accuser and a slanderer. He hates the light and punishes those who disagree with him. Satan has spent his whole life as an “adversary” of God and of good. He attempts to defeat God by slandering and accusing with evil intent any good thing. The story of Job has Satan accusing God of unfairly blessing Job. Satan said, “you take the hedge away, let him suffer, and he will deny you!” Satan's accusations against God and Job were wrong. In Isaiah 5:20-23, we learn that Satan's business is to turn our value systems upside down. He wishes to make evil look good and good look evil. In Revelation 12:9-10, Satan is the accuser of the brethren. Satan's way is to accuse and slander every good thing.

The devil makes an enemy of anyone who dares to criticize any sin. He calls people who speak out against sin “hate mongers” with phobias. He supports those who think there is no such thing as sin. He makes fun of and puts down everything Christian and moral. Being Christian isn't “cool.” He labels Christians as “Pharisaical” and “hypocritical.” He concentrates on all the things “wrong” with the church and never sees any good.

Fourth, the devil loves to confuse the issue; He tries to make the Bible, centuries of tradition, and common sense, as irrelevant. He tells people they cannot trust in God or His Word. He says we don't know whether the unborn is a person; we don't know whether we're males or females; and we don't know what marriage is. He tells people what they, as an individual, think or feel is more important than anything else. He's propagated confusion about many things. He'll tell you, “There is no God”; or “We cannot know God”; or “God does not care about you.” He wants us to think the Bible is not trustworthy, that it's just a bunch of historical myths. He says the church is only interested in what it can get out of you; all Christians are hypocrites in his mind. He says, “There is no hell”; “everyone will be saved eventually”; or “there is a purgatory.”

He will suggest to you, “You can sin, and God really won't judge you.” When people are tempted to sin, he whispers, “Just a little won't hurt,” or “No one will know.” Satan says, “Man isn't responsible for his sins—he was born a sinner and sinful.” He argues, “Man was not created, but evolved from lower forms of life.” He loves to tell lies that confuse us. If we believe the devil, we will never know the truth. The devil and his followers will look down on you if you don't approve of everything they think or do. Our society will think all beliefs are equally valid and they try to force Christians to be silent about their moral and religious convictions. The world will hate you for believing in Jesus. The devil labels Christians as “mean-spirited” and “judgmental,” though they speak the truth with kind motives.

Fifth, the devil wants you to ignore the Word of God; he doesn't want you to believe. Romans 10:17 says, “faith comes by hearing” and hearing by the Word of God. Faith is essential to our salvation; and because Satan doesn't want us to know the truth he tries to keep us from reading and studying the Bible. He knows that abiding in the Word of God teaches us the truth, and “the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). He wants us to be ignorant of the very



thing that will judge us on the last day, that is, the Words of Jesus (John 12:48).

Sixth, Satan likes to offer alternatives. He offers counterfeit religion and counterfeit churches that differ from the New Testament. He says, “one church is as good as another”; and “it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you love Jesus.” He offers entertainment in place of worship. He tells man that he can make up his own religions, write his own creeds, and have his own morals, and do his own thing. But when men trust themselves, they stop being God’s people. Satan loves to re-label important doctrinal matters as “non-issues.” He loves to confuse doctrine with opinion, making human opinions and traditions more important than the true teaching of God’s Word.

Seventh, Satan poisons relationships. Satan wants you to blame everyone else for your troubles. He plants pride in your heart and encourages selfishness. He promotes jealousy and envy. He tells you to forget kindness and compassion. He encourages gossip and slander of those who you dislike. He whispers, “get even” and “take revenge!” He starts fusses as often as he can. God tells us what kind of people we should be. He says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Satan loves to cause discord among brethren! Galatians 5:13-21 speaks of the works of the flesh by which Satan works. Satan will do all he can to cause problems between brethren in the church. Some works of the flesh include “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envyings.” All are problems of the heart, fostered by the lies and the prompting of Satan, the tempter.

Satan plants evil thoughts in our hearts to tempt us. Evil destroys friendships, families, and even churches. Satan put it in Judas' heart to betray Jesus in John 13:2. What is he putting into your heart and mind? James 3:14-16 says, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

Eighth, Satan wants you to be insensitive to sin. He tries to change the way that we look at sin by ignoring or excusing it. If he can re-label sin as harmless, then he might persuade you to do evil. Sin does untold harm. Paul described a sinful culture, “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:17-19) Oh, this is tragic; it’s destructive!

People who know little about the Bible can still quote Matthew 7:1, “Judge ye not, that you be not judged.” Denying the truth doesn’t help. The Lord Jesus also said, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). There is a time to make judgments, and everyone does judge, even people who are against it. Some think it’s right to judge someone for judging but never realize that they’re doing the very thing that they condemn. They give themselves the privilege of judging, but deny that privilege to others.

Some say Jesus never called anyone a sinner, but Jesus did call people sinners. In Matthew 23, Jesus scorches the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, calling them sons of hell. In the book of Revelation, Jesus rebukes some churches for tolerating doctrinal and moral sin. He

demanded their repentance. Jesus loved sinners, but He tells them to “go and sin no more” (John 5:14). Jesus didn’t ignore their sins, but forgave them and pointed them to a better way.

Jesus never excused sin; He never covered it up. He never lied about where sinful behavior came from or allowed people to escape responsibility for it. He loved the sinner, but He condemned the sin and called people to repent. He didn’t leave people where He found them. He hated sin so much that He was willing to die to remove the consequences of it from the people He loved.

Which is better: an immoral person with high self-esteem who deceives himself that sin doesn’t matter and then he ends up lost; or a person who, realizing his sin is wrong, repents, obeys the Lord, and enjoys eternal life? Jesus lovingly confronts sin and helps the sinner overcome it. Satan, on the other hand, tempts us to sin, enjoys the sin, and he persecutes the brethren for exposing sin to the light.

Satan uses humor to get you to laugh at sin; he makes it appear “fun” and “harmless.” He develops movies and television shows that make fun of the righteous and make heroes out of sinners. He uses humor to stimulate the worst in people. 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.” The devil has no conscience! He hides how sin has caused broken lives and destroyed homes to only show you the pleasures of sin. He makes sinful behavior “fashionable” and “acceptable.” He whispers to you how good you'd feel, how free you'd be, how good you'll look in front of your friends whenever you sin. He makes you think all this fun will last forever. Of course, he’s lying to you. He would take away your desire to be different from the world, to do what’s right. He’ll “stretch the truth” about sin, saying, “everybody's doing it.” He’ll say, “times have changed; people don't judge you for what you're doing any longer.” He’ll give you every excuse possible to keep you deceived. He doesn’t want you to know that your sins will cost you your soul.

We must resist the devil and stand with Christ. Ephesians 6:10-13 says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” Christ will strengthen us so that we can stand firm.

First Peter 5:8 says, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” The way to win against the devil is to draw close to God. 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.”

We first draw close to God by believing in Jesus Christ and in His Word! Without faith we can’t please God (Hebrews 11:6). We must turn from sin and turn to the ways of the Lord. The Lord said in Luke 13:3, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Jesus died to forgive our sins; how can we continue in sin? We can’t! With love we must confess Jesus Christ as God’s Son and be baptized into Christ. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Won’t you be baptized today?

## God's Gift of Love

When God sent His Son Jesus into the world, He was sending His very heart filled with love. Today, we're going to remember that gift of love. We seek to please the Lord and to follow Him. When we follow the Lord, we know that we'll find a joyous, abundant life filled with peace and purpose. God's ways are always righteous and kind. They lift up rather than tear down. They give hope rather than discouragement. They lead to wisdom rather than foolishness. The more you know about God, the more you'll love Him and you'll praise Him.

God is love. Everything about Him reveals His love. The Lord Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son (and some versions say "only begotten Son"), that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). Jesus didn't come to this world to condemn us, but to save us. He knew sin was our real enemy, and He suffered on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

God planned to send Jesus. An angel of the Lord told Joseph, "'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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 the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matthew 1:20-23). Jesus is indeed God with us, and we're so thankful that He came into the world.

Our Scripture reading today comes from 1 John 4:7-11. It talks about the need for us to love and how God has loved us.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Yes, this is God's encouragement for us to love one another, even as He has loved us. Many people think of the infant Jesus when they think of God's gift of love. God gave us Jesus to be one of us. He was like us physically and endured all the challenges of growing up in this world. Because He became one of us, He understands all our strengths and weaknesses. John said that Jesus didn't "need anyone to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). Though Jesus was the Son of God, He became flesh and dwelled among us. The Hebrew writer observed, "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" (Hebrews 4:14-16). Because He understands us and was

tempted like we are, He can help us in our greatest times of need.

God knew that we needed Him! No one else would do. The Lord Jesus said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). There are many prophets in the Old Testament, but only one Son of God. Moses gave us the Law, but Jesus gave us grace and truth. The prophets warned people, but Jesus sacrificed Himself for people. Angels could tell us God's message, but Jesus Himself was God's message, the Word. No one else could do what Jesus did for us. Revelation 5:12 reminds us that because Jesus was slain as a Lamb for our sins, He is worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

The Lord Jesus gave three reasons why He came into the world. First, He came to save us from our sins. He said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus came looking for the lost so that He might save them from sin. Because of sin, we were all lost at one time, and we all needed a Savior. So many of the heartaches in this life come from sinful behavior. As we've seen, when people reject God they fill their lives with every kind of evil. Jesus wanted to bring salvation to your life and mine so that we could have hope and true life. Jesus isn't trying to manipulate us but to bless us. The Lord Jesus said, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Sin separates us from God and enslaves us to evil; Jesus redeemed us with the price of His blood. He redeemed us by giving Himself, His very own body and blood. There could be no higher price, no greater gift.

Jesus not only died for us as individuals, He also wanted to rescue us from this sinful world. Paul greeted the churches of Galatia, saying, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Galatians 1:3-5).

One can truly describe the world into which Jesus was born as "evil." The predominant religion of the day was a mixture of superstition with paganism. Because it was a world with a warped understanding of God, people lived with warped values and warped morals. Romans 1:28-32 says, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Our world is much like the world of the first century; and each day it seems to grow more and more evil. More and more people participate in that evil with the approval of others. How tragic that people think a sinful world is better than a world where God is honored and served!

Second, Jesus said He came to bless our lives with a better way, an abundant way of life. The Lord Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). In Christ, our lives overflow with His love. Titus 2:14 says Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."



Jesus not only saves, He changes people. He transforms them from sinners to saints. His love, and His truth, and His life show us a better way to live and a better way to treat our fellow man. The Lord taught us kindness, respect, integrity, honesty, and justice. He's the Prince of peace, the hope of mankind, and the balm of Gilead.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." When people live in sin, they spread misery and heartache everywhere; but when they serve the Lord, they become a blessing to everyone. They encourage, give hope, show love, bring peace, and spread joy and good news. Christians do not speak out against sin because of hate but because they know the agony and hurt that sin brings. The Lord offers something better. He was indeed God's gift of love. What God gave to us was not things, but a Person.

Third, Jesus said He came to bear witness to the truth. John 1:14 says of Jesus, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus proclaimed in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus was the very embodiment of truth and honesty. Because of Jesus, we know what God is like. Because of Jesus, we know what righteousness truly is; and because of Jesus, we have the ability to distinguish truth from error.

When Jesus appeared before Pilate, Pilate wanted to know if the rumors he had heard were true. John 18:37 reads, "Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" Jesus and the truth that God reveals are inseparably bound with each other. If we wish to know the truth, we must listen to His voice.

Our world is filled with contradictory lies, myths, and false hopes. Jesus came to give us an undeniable and unvarying path to the truth. How wonderful to have an unchanging moral and spiritual standard that provides a basis for our values. Since God has raised Jesus from the dead, we can have confidence that the Lord's teaching is true. You can trust His promises, and you can believe heaven is waiting for you. First John 5:20 says, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." My friends, it is a great gift to know what and Who is true.

The Lord Jesus wants to bless you with His love. He wanted His death on the cross to make a difference in your life. If you take seriously the sacrifice of Jesus for your sins, you'll come to love Him. The Lord Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Let His sacrifice for you matter! The Lord Jesus was willing to pay the ultimate price to get your attention and to demonstrate His complete and wonderful love for you. He wanted to draw you to Himself. He wanted you to love Him the way that He loved you.

Romans 5:6-8 says, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were

still sinners, Christ died for us.” We were once weak and needed saving; we were once ungodly and didn’t take the ways of God seriously; and we were sinners who violated God’s teaching and were offensive to Him. In spite of these, the Lord Jesus willingly died for us to show His love.

When we respond to His love and become Christians, our response reveals that the cross matters. Surely, the God who created us and gave us His Son has many more blessings in store for us. Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” In Christ, God’s love never ends! Romans 8:35-39 asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure (convinced) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” My friend, nothing can separate you from the love of God; but do not take His love for granted. Never turn away from God as some do.

When Jesus redeemed you with His blood, He gave His utmost for you. We all need to remind ourselves of how God values us as Christians, as His children. First Peter 2:9-10 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Don’t let anyone or anything rob you of a close, loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Love Him and serve Him. Give yourself to Him.

Jesus came into the world to save us from sin, to give us a better way, and to reveal the truth to us. Does it matter whether you’re saved or lost? whether you live with wisdom or with foolishness? whether you know the truth or whether you’ve been deceived with falsehoods? You must come to understand this: the Lord Jesus is the most important Person in your life. No one else can bless you, love you, forgive you, give you hope, or save your soul but Jesus Christ. You need Him!

The love of Jesus is indeed a gift. The Lord loved us even when we didn’t deserve it, even when we were lost in our sins. He took the initiative and offered His body and blood on the cross, because He didn’t want to leave us where He found us. He came to lift us out of darkness and out of hopelessness. Don’t take this marvelous gift of love and salvation for granted; it’s priceless. Nothing else compares.

If you wish to enjoy the love of God, you must accept His gift of love. Believe in the Lord Jesus, turn from the sin that only destroys, confess Jesus Christ as God’s Son, and be baptized into Christ. When you’re baptized into Christ, you’re “crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (Romans 6:6). This baptism in an immersion in water, just as Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and just as Philip baptized the eunuch. When you’re united with Christ, the Lord sets you free from sin and makes you His child, a fellow-heir of heaven. Will you accept His gift of love? Will you love and obey Him?

## Pray Without Ceasing

To the Christian, few blessings compare to answered prayer, but unfortunately many have ceased to pray. Today, we look at the need to pray without ceasing. The Bible opens the door to the God, the God who created us. It teaches us who He is, what He's done, and why we should serve Him and Him alone. The greatest blessing of life is to have a deep relationship with God, our Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. Studying Scripture and prayer go hand in hand. One can't grow spiritually and grow close to God unless he both studies the Word and prays regularly.

Prayer was important to people in ancient times. When Moses faced the Red Sea ahead and Pharaoh's armies behind, what did he do? He prayed. Daniel would rather be put into the lion's den for a night than to go one day without prayer. When Jonah was thrown overboard and thought he would drown, he prayed. When Judah had become so wicked with Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain. Jesus regularly sought out a quiet place to pray—even though He lived a sinless life. He needed the time with His Father, and so do we. If the devil can keep us from praying, he can keep us from God. Jesus began the cross with a prayer and He ended the cross with a prayer.

Someone said, "When you can't do anything else, you can pray"; but why wait until you're desperate before you pray? Prayer is God's marvelous gift! Prayer is the gift of Himself, His ear, His heart, and His love. We must never neglect to approach our Father even one day. James 5:16 says that, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." God can do more than we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Prayer is a great blessing!

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to Luke 18:1-8. Jesus tells a parable about prayer and how we need to continue to pray and not lose heart.

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.' And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

Prayer and faith go hand in hand. I hope that you have deep faith when you pray. In its simplest definition, prayer is people speaking from their hearts to Almighty God. What makes this sacred and spiritual is not that man is speaking, but that God is listening. God invites men to pray to Him.

The Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7-11). First Peter 5:6-7

says, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

The apostle Paul urged Timothy, and all of us, to pray. He said, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Entreaties are an earnest asking of God for our needs; God wants us to ask Him to provide for our needs. The word "prayers" refers to the whole range of petitions made to God. Intercessions means we're seeking the hearing of God on behalf of others and their needs. Thanksgiving expresses gratitude for God's blessings. Prayer is how we approach our Father with the concerns of our hearts, how we give thanks, and how we praise our Father for His grace. In the model prayer, our Lord Jesus addresses God as "our Father" (Matthew 6:9-15). Our Father in heaven has compassion on His people. He is ready to grant their requests.

Luke 18:1-8 says, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray (all the time) and not lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'" If men are willing to answer someone's earnest plea, don't you think God—who's greater and more just than we are—will also answer our pleas?

First Thessalonians 5:17 simply says, "pray without ceasing." I realize that no one can spend every moment of every day in prayer. We have to eat sometime and we have to sleep sometime. What Paul is saying is, "Don't quit praying." Don't live a prayerless life. Colossians 4:2 says, "Continue steadfastly in", another version says, "devote yourself to prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." Pray daily; pray from your heart. Draw close and stay close to God.

The Scriptures teach us how to pray. The Lord Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). When we pray, we should recognize that God hears our prayers because of our privilege to speak in the name of Jesus Christ. When we ask in the name of Jesus, Jesus promises to do what we ask. By answering our prayers, the Father is glorified in and by His Son, Jesus.

When we pray, let's consider God's will and God's desires, not merely our own. First John 5:14-15 says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." What we want and what God wills are not always the same. We must study God's Word to know God's will. When we let our desires control our hearts and our prayers, we cause problems for ourselves.

James 4:1-3 asks, "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. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." God will not grant our selfish prayers that fill our passions, but not His will.



When we pray, we must ask in faith. James 1:5-8 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." God is generous to us, but He wants us to believe in Him and in His kindness. God cannot trust us with His blessing when we aren't sure about Him. Let's trust God!

When we pray for God's help, let's pray with confidence. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence (boldness) to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

We can come boldly to God's throne to ask for help in times of temptation and weakness. God loves us and is more than willing to help us when we're tempted. The Lord Jesus told Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He Himself was praying about His upcoming death, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). We must monitor our souls, watching and praying for God's help. Though we want to do what is right, we face fleshly temptations. God helps us when we pray.

When we pray, let's do so with humble hearts. The Lord Jesus told a parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt. He said, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 'I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted'" (Luke 18:10-14). The Pharisee was reading his resume and telling God how valuable he was rather than realizing his dependence upon God's kindness. If we wish to boast, let's boast in the Lord. Paul once asked the Corinthians who had become arrogant, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Let's remember that we all stand in need of God's grace and forgiveness; that we must approach God with humility.

When we pray, let's pray with forgiveness for others in our hearts. The Lord Jesus said, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions" (Mark 11:25). God forgives us when we're merciful and forgiving toward others. If we harden our hearts toward others, we'll have no promise that God will forgive us.

Before you pray today, I hope you'll pause and consider God, the One to whom you're praying. If you're praying according to His will, the Father Himself is paying attention to your prayer. We can pray anytime and anywhere because God is omnipresent—everywhere present. Jeremiah 23:24 says, "'Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' declares the LORD." Wherever we are, God is present.

Before praying today, remember that God sees and knows everything about our lives and circumstances. Nothing escapes His attention. When we pray, He knows what's in our hearts and what we need even before we ask. Proverbs 15:11 says, "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit." He knows just what we need and when we need it. He understands our lives and needs even better than we know ourselves. God stands ready to help, and He wants us to approach Him for the help that we most need.

Before praying today, remember that God is omnipotent! He's all powerful! Jeremiah 32:17 says, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." God can do things that we can't do. We're limited humans, limited in time, in energy, and in ability. Some things are too hard for us, but not for God. Let's never be afraid to appeal to God for the help that we need to accomplish those things that we cannot do for ourselves. God wants to be asked; He wants us to seek His help; and He wants us to knock at His door. He stands ready to help when we need Him.

Before we pray today, let's remember that God loves us. Romans 8:32 says, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" If God our Father did not hold back His own Son but gave Him up, why would we think He would withhold some small blessing from us?

When we pray, let's give thanks for God's kindness and goodness. God blesses us richly every day. Our lives would be so much poorer physically and spiritually if we didn't have God in our lives. Let's never ignore God or take His grace for granted. Where would we be if He had not been with us? Many in our society think we no longer need God; they could not be more wrong! We do need God! Our access to God through Christ leads us to salvation and gives us hope and assurance.

If you've neglected praying regularly or stopped praying altogether, I want to encourage you to start praying regularly again. The Lord Jesus said, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you" (Mark 11:22-24).

Some have stopped believing that God answers prayer, but God answers prayers every day. We can have confidence in God because God keeps His promises. God acts in ways that He would not have acted if we had not prayed. Our prayers matter to God. James 5:16 says, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." Ephesians 3:20 says God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." I don't believe in the power of my prayer; I believe in the power of God to answer prayer.

If you want God to answer your prayers, then follow Him and do what He desires. Love Him; get right with Him. To become a Christian believe in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins and change your ways, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. According to the New Testament, baptism into Christ is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. You can read about this in Acts 2:38; or Acts 22:16; or Romans 6:3-7. Why not worship at a church of Christ, study with a teacher there, and become a Christian?