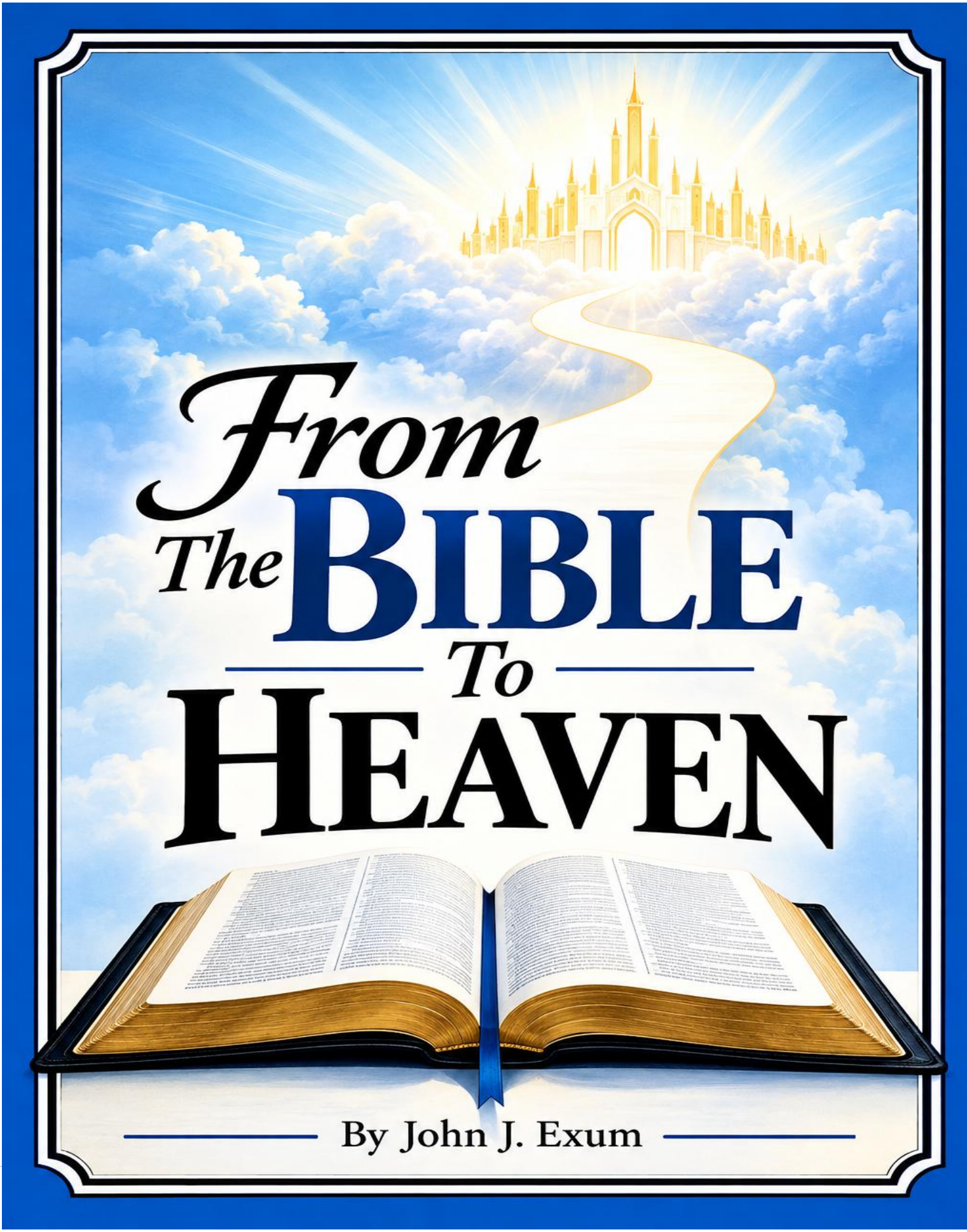

From
The BIBLE
To
HEAVEN
By John J. Exum

A Series of Sermons

Preached by John J. Exum

at Hannibal church of Christ

in Hannibal, MO in 2026.

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I dedicate this book to the Hannibal church of Christ in Hannibal, MO for allowing me to present these lesson on the week of September 27-30, 2026. I am also blessed to be their preacher. Would also like to dedicate this book to my sweet wife, Karly.

“Give Me the Bible”

The hymn “Give Me the Bible,” written by Priscilla J. Owens, fits our Gospel Meeting theme, “From the Bible to Heaven,” especially well because its recurring picture is the Bible as God’s light guiding us through this life until we reach eternity. The refrain speaks of its light guiding us in the narrow way “till night shall vanish in eternal day,” and the final stanza looks beyond the grave toward Heaven itself. That is the great purpose of this lesson. If we desire to reach Heaven, we must possess the Bible, investigate the Bible, believe the Bible, love the Bible, and exemplify the Bible in our lives. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.” Our English word Bible ultimately comes from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning “books,” and Hebrews 10:7 speaks of what is written “in the volume of the book.” Yet what we call the Bible is not merely another book among books. It is a collection of inspired writings forming God’s revelation to mankind. It tells us where we came from, why we are here, what has gone wrong with mankind through sin, what God has done through Jesus Christ to save us, how we are to live, and how we are to prepare for eternity. Many books can educate us about this world, but the Bible prepares us for the world to come. This is why our theme is “From the Bible to Heaven.” Heaven is our desired destination, God’s Word reveals the way, and we cannot discard the directions and reasonably expect to arrive at the destination. Psalm 119:105 therefore connects perfectly with the hymn “Give Me the Bible,” because Owens repeatedly describes Scripture in terms of light, guidance, and finally Heaven.

We need to study our duties toward the Bible because merely possessing a Bible is not enough. It is possible to own a Bible without knowing the Bible. It is possible to know facts from the Bible without obeying the Bible. It is even possible to defend the Bible while failing to live by the Bible. Therefore, our concern is not merely, “Do I have a Bible?” We must ask, “What am I doing with it? Do I investigate it? Do I believe it? Do I love it? Do I live it?” Jesus said in John 12:48, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” If God’s Word will meet us at the judgment, then God’s Word needs to guide us during life. The original outline gives us an easy acrostic by which we can remember our responsibilities toward Scripture. B stands for Buy a Bible. I stands for Investigate the Bible. The second B stands for Believe the Bible. L stands for Love the Bible. E stands for Exemplify the Bible. Together those letters spell BIBLE, and every one of those responsibilities brings us back to the central theme of this Gospel

Meeting: from the Bible, through faithful obedience, toward Heaven. This acrostic outline is credited to the late Gus Nichols.

We begin with the responsibility to buy a Bible. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding." The point is not that God's truth can literally be purchased. The inspired writer is emphasizing its value. Truth is worth whatever sacrifice is necessary to obtain it, and once we have learned God's truth, we must never trade it away for popularity, family pressure, religious tradition, cultural acceptance, personal convenience, human philosophy, or the approval of friends. Jesus prayed in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." Therefore, when we say, "Give me the Bible," we are really saying, "Give me truth." That attitude must characterize every person who sincerely wants to go from the Bible to Heaven. We cannot claim that Heaven is our destination while treating the truth that directs us there as something negotiable. If God has spoken, our responsibility is to receive what He has said, hold to it, and refuse to sell it regardless of what the world may offer us in exchange.

Acts 19 provides a striking example of people learning the truth and abandoning error. Acts 19:19 says, "Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all." Those people discovered that some books were not worth keeping. Not everything written is true simply because someone printed it, and not everything presented as spiritual or religious deserves our confidence. We live in an age overflowing with information. We have books, websites, podcasts, videos, social media, religious teachers, and commentaries available to us almost constantly. These things may sometimes help us, but none of them is our final authority. The Bible must test the teacher, rather than the teacher sitting in judgment over the Bible. The Bible alone gives God's revealed message of salvation. Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Consider the question behind our entire meeting: How do I get from where I am now to Heaven? The answer is not found in human speculation. God has revealed His saving message in Scripture. That is why every home ought to have Bibles that are actually opened, read, marked, studied, discussed, and obeyed. Parents should make Scripture familiar to their children. Second Timothy 3:15 says, "and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

It is better to buy Bibles than to pay fines, and there is wisdom behind that statement. We routinely spend money on things that will eventually disappear. Jesus

warned in Matthew 6:19-20, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” What value do we place upon knowing God’s will? A good Bible may serve us for decades and influence our eternal destiny. We should obtain a Bible with good, readable print and make use of tools such as a concordance, maps, dictionaries, cross-references, and other helps that encourage serious Bible study. A readable Bible is better than an impressive Bible that remains unopened. At the same time, we must always remember an important distinction: study helps help us study the Bible; they are not the Bible. Every commentary was written by an uninspired man. Every preacher is capable of being wrong. Every teacher must be tested by Scripture. Acts 17:11 says, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” That is the proper attitude. “Give me the Bible.” Do not merely give me someone’s opinion about the Bible. Give me God’s Word.

The next responsibility is to investigate the Bible. God expects His Word to be studied. Second Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Bible study requires diligence. We must learn who is speaking, to whom he is speaking, under which covenant the statement was made, what the context is, what the passage actually says, and how it harmonizes with the remainder of Scripture. Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Peter commanded Christians in 2 Peter 3:18 to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Spiritual growth does not happen accidentally. If our theme is “From the Bible to Heaven,” then we need to know what the Bible says about the road. We would think it foolish for a traveler to throw away his directions while insisting that he is determined to reach his destination, yet spiritually people often attempt to do exactly that. If Heaven is truly our goal, then careful investigation of the book that reveals the way to Heaven cannot be an optional part of our lives.

Biblical ignorance is dangerous because ignorance can alienate a person from God. Ephesians 4:18 describes those who were “alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them.” First Corinthians 2:8 also demonstrates the tragic consequences that can accompany ignorance. Ignorance does not transform error into truth, and sincerity does not transform the wrong road into the right road. Jesus warned about religious error in Matthew 22:29 when He said, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Notice the connection. They were mistaken

because they did not know the Scriptures. Therefore, if we want to avoid spiritual error, we must investigate the Bible. Knowledge of Scripture is not merely an academic exercise. There are eternal consequences attached to whether we know, understand, believe, and obey what God has revealed.

Knowledge of God's Word also helps keep us from sin and influences us toward salvation. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You." God's Word does more than fill the mind with information. It shapes the conscience, identifies temptation, exposes sin, teaches righteousness, warns us where sinful roads end, and reveals the way back to God. Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures were able to make him "wise for salvation" in 2 Timothy 3:15. The third stanza of "Give Me the Bible" asks for Scripture to illuminate one's steps and reveal the dangers of this world, describing it as a lamp of safety and the light showing the path of peace. That is almost a poetic commentary on Psalm 119:105. If we want God's Word to light our path, we have to open it and investigate where it tells us to walk. A closed Bible cannot direct our steps, and an ignored Bible cannot shape our decisions. We must investigate the Bible so thoroughly that its truths become part of the way we think, judge, decide, and live.

We must also believe the Bible. We cannot truly believe God while refusing His Word. Faith in God necessarily involves confidence in what God has said. During the storm recorded in Acts 27, Paul declared in verse 25, "Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me." Notice Paul's reasoning: God said it, therefore Paul believed it. Biblical faith is not believing whatever we want and attaching God's name to it. Biblical faith hears what God has revealed and trusts Him enough to act upon it. This principle is also seen in passages such as John 3:4-5, where Jesus' teaching had to be received rather than reshaped according to human assumptions. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." We cannot separate Christ from Christ's teaching. A person cannot reasonably claim to trust Christ while refusing to abide in the words Christ has given.

We must believe the Bible to be the Word of God. First Thessalonians 2:13 speaks of those who received the message "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." That conviction determines how we approach Scripture. If the Bible is merely man's word, we can accept what appeals to us, reject what challenges us, and rewrite what culture dislikes. But if Scripture is God's Word, our responsibility changes completely. We must receive it with humility and submission. We do not stand over Scripture as its judge. We stand under Scripture as those who will be judged by it. We

are not free to determine which commands deserve obedience based upon whether they fit the thinking of our generation. God's Word does not derive its authority from our agreement with it. We submit because the message is not merely the word of men but the Word of God.

Believing the Bible also means believing the gospel. Romans 1:16 identifies the gospel as God's power unto salvation. The Bible brings us to Christ, and the gospel announces God's saving work through Jesus. Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. That gospel demands a response. We must hear God's Word according to Romans 10:17. We must believe in Christ according to John 8:24. We must repent according to Acts 17:30. We must confess Christ according to Romans 10:9-10. We must be baptized into Christ according to Galatians 3:27 and Acts 2:38. Then we must remain faithful to Him according to Revelation 2:10. This beautifully fits our theme. The Bible reveals the gospel, the gospel brings us to Christ, and Christ is the way to the Father and eternal life. We are therefore moving from the Bible, through the gospel revealed in the Bible, into Christ through obedient faith, and onward in faithfulness toward Heaven.

Our faith in Scripture is not a blind leap because there is evidence for its inspiration. Consider the Bible's unity, its fulfilled prophecy, its historical reliability, the consistency of its message, its claims of inspiration, and its confirmation through Christ and His resurrection. Paul declared in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Peter explained in 2 Peter 1:20-21 that holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when Scripture speaks, we are dealing with revelation originating with God. This is why the Bible deserves something far greater than casual interest. If this book is God's revealed Word, then what it says about God, sin, salvation, worship, righteousness, judgment, and eternity deserves our complete attention and submission.

We must not only possess, investigate, and believe the Bible; we must love the Bible. Many people do not. Second Thessalonians 2:10 describes people who "did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Matthew 13:15 likewise shows the danger of hearts becoming unreceptive to divine truth. It is possible to hear truth without loving truth. Notice that truth and salvation are connected. We must love truth even when truth corrects us, rebukes us, exposes sin, requires repentance, contradicts what we previously believed, or demands sacrifice. A person who genuinely loves truth says, "If God's Word shows that I am wrong, I want to change." Loving the truth does not mean loving only the portions of Scripture that comfort us. It means loving God's truth enough to allow it to correct our thinking and transform our lives.

We cannot love God and hate His Word. First John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” Loving God involves respecting what God has commanded. We therefore must never be embarrassed by biblical teaching simply because society rejects it. Jesus warned in Mark 8:38 against being ashamed of Him and His words. Galatians 1:7-9 shows that Paul refused to alter the gospel to make it more acceptable, and 2 Corinthians 4:1-4 demonstrates the necessity of openly presenting the truth rather than handling God’s Word deceitfully. Our message must remain, “Give me the Bible.” Not, “Give me the Bible when it agrees with me.” Not, “Give me the Bible except when society has changed.” Not, “Give me the Bible as long as obedience costs nothing.” Rather, “Give me the Bible because I love the God who gave it.” That is the attitude of someone who loves the truth and understands its eternal importance.

The second stanza of “Give Me the Bible” moves into the difficult moments of life: heartbreak, sin, grief, and fear. In those circumstances, the singer still asks for the words of Christ and the light that points toward the Savior. That is when our love for Scripture becomes especially precious. The Bible is not merely a book for the church building. It is God’s message for life, suffering, temptation, sorrow, death, and eternity. When life is pleasant, we need the Bible. When life is painful, we need the Bible. When temptation confronts us, we need the Bible. When grief overwhelms us, we need the Bible. When death comes near, we need the Bible. When we contemplate eternity, we need the Bible. From beginning to end, God’s Word provides the light we need for the journey from this life toward Heaven.

Finally, we must exemplify the Bible by showing it in our lives. The Bible must eventually move from the page, to the mind, to the heart, and then to the life. James warned in James 1:22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” We have not truly benefited from Bible study until its teaching influences how we live. The world should be able to see biblical teaching reflected in our speech, our marriages, our homes, our work, our honesty, our treatment of others, our worship, our morality, our priorities, and our response to hardship. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” We should become living demonstrations of what God’s Word produces when people believe and obey it. The Bible is not intended merely to provide information that we can repeat. It is intended to direct lives that bring glory to God.

Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12, “but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Timothy was not merely to teach truth; Timothy was to embody truth. Our lives must not contradict the Bible we profess to

believe. A person may carry a Bible under his arm every Sunday while ignoring its teaching Monday through Saturday. Christianity is not merely knowing the road to Heaven. Christianity involves walking that road. Matthew 7:13-14 says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction... Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life." It is not enough to know that there is a narrow way. We must enter it and walk in it. It is not enough to know what Scripture teaches. We must exemplify its teaching in our lives.

This brings the whole lesson together beautifully. The refrain of "Give Me the Bible" pictures Scripture's light guiding the believer along "the narrow way" until the darkness of earthly life gives way to eternal day. Its final stanza looks toward the open grave and beyond it toward Heaven. That is essentially our entire Gospel Meeting theme in song: "From the Bible to Heaven." We buy the Bible because we value the truth. We investigate the Bible because we need its light. We believe the Bible because it is God's Word. We love the Bible because we love the God who gave it. We exemplify the Bible because God's Word must govern our lives. Each responsibility builds upon the others. It does little good to possess a Bible we never investigate. Investigation accomplishes little if we refuse to believe what we discover. Claiming to believe Scripture is hollow if we do not love its truth, and professing to love the Bible is meaningless if we refuse to exemplify its teaching in our lives.

And where is all of this leading? Home. The Bible does not merely tell us how to make life a little better here. It points sinful humanity to Jesus Christ and shows us how to prepare for eternity. The hymn begins with a wanderer needing light and ends with the believer looking beyond the grave toward Heaven. That is exactly what we want this entire Gospel Meeting to accomplish. We want to begin with an open Bible and end with our eyes fixed upon Heaven. We want God's Word to illuminate every step between here and there. So buy the Bible because truth is worth possessing. Investigate the Bible because ignorance is spiritually dangerous. Believe the Bible because it is the Word of God. Love the Bible because we love the God who gave it. Exemplify the Bible because Christianity must be lived and not merely discussed. Open the Bible. Learn the Bible. Believe the Bible. Obey the Bible. Live the Bible. And let its light guide us all the way from the Bible to Heaven.

The Gospel Is for All

One of the great truths of the Gospel is found in one little word: all. Jesus did not die for one race, one nation, one social class, or one generation, and the Gospel was not designed for only one part of the world. Jesus commanded in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The hymn "The Gospel Is for All" beautifully expresses this biblical truth in the words, "Of one the Lord has made the race," "Where sin has gone must go His grace," "For why should we be blest alone?" and "Unless they hear they cannot live." Paul expressed the same conviction in Romans 1:14-17. He said, "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise." He then declared, "I am ready to preach the gospel," followed by the great statement, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Why was Paul not ashamed? Because, as he continued, "it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." The question before us, then, is why the Gospel is for all, and the Scriptures give us clear reasons why every person everywhere needs to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is for all because all are one human family. The hymn expresses it simply: "Of one the Lord has made the race." God is the Creator of all humanity. Humanity began with God's creative work as recorded in Genesis 1:26-27, and every human being ultimately traces his existence back to that divine act of creation. Paul declared in Acts 17:26 that God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth." Beneath our differences of nationality, language, culture, and appearance, we share a common humanity. Every human being possesses value because humanity was made in the image of God according to Genesis 1:27. Our value does not come from the nation in which we were born, the language we speak, the amount of money we possess, our education, our social standing, or the color of our skin. Human worth begins with the fact that mankind was created by God and made in His image. When we understand that fundamental truth, we begin to understand why the Gospel cannot be restricted to one particular group of people. The God who created all humanity has provided a saving message intended for all humanity.

God does not show partiality. Peter learned this great lesson when he entered the household of Cornelius. In Acts 10:34 he declared, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality," and then in verse 35 he continued, "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." God is not the God of one nation only. Paul asked in Romans 3:29, "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the

God of the Gentiles?" and immediately answered, "Yes, of the Gentiles also." The Gospel therefore removes the barriers that men so often construct. It reaches across racial barriers, national barriers, economic barriers, social barriers, and cultural barriers. In Christ, earthly distinctions do not determine our standing before God, as Galatians 3:26-28 makes clear. This is why Jesus sent His disciples to all nations. Matthew 28:19 commands them to "make disciples of all the nations." Mark 16:15 commands, "Preach the gospel to every creature." Luke 24:47 says that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached "to all nations," and Acts 1:8 records that the apostles were to be witnesses "to the end of the earth." The Gospel is for all because all humanity comes from the same Creator.

The Gospel is also for all because all have the same problem. The hymn says, "Through one has come the fall." Sin entered the world through man's disobedience. God gave Adam and Eve His command in Genesis 2:16-17, but they chose to disobey God as recorded in Genesis 3:1-6. Romans 5:12 explains that through Adam sin entered the human world and death followed. Adam opened the door to sin, but Scripture does not teach that we inherit Adam's personal guilt. Ezekiel 18:20 explicitly states, "The son shall not bear the guilt of the father." Each person becomes accountable for his own sin, and Romans 3:23 declares, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Adam's disobedience introduced sin into the human world, but we are not condemned because we inherited Adam's personal guilt. We become sinners when we ourselves violate the will of God, and this personal responsibility for sin is essential to understanding both mankind's problem and God's solution.

Sin has become the universal human problem. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10 declares, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray." First John 3:4 identifies sin as lawlessness, Isaiah 59:1-2 teaches that sin separates man from God, and Romans 6:23 declares, "The wages of sin is death." Sin does not respect human distinctions. The rich can sin and the poor can sin. The educated can sin and the uneducated can sin. The religious can sin and the irreligious can sin. Romans 3:9 places Jews and Gentiles alike "all under sin." Whatever differences may exist among people in this life, those differences do not remove the universal spiritual problem of sin. Every accountable person eventually confronts the same problem because every accountable person chooses to violate the will of God.

If the disease is universal, the remedy must be offered universally. This is why the hymn says, "Where sin has gone must go His grace." Wherever there are sinners, there

are people who need the Gospel. There is no country too distant, no community too small, no person too insignificant, and no sinner beyond the saving power of the Gospel if he will come to Christ in obedient faith. We must never look at a nation, community, family, or individual and conclude that the Gospel does not belong there. Sin has already crossed every border mankind has established, and therefore the saving message of Christ must cross those borders as well. Where sin has gone, the Gospel needs to go.

The Gospel is for all because Christ died for all. "Where sin has gone must go His grace; the Gospel is for all." God's love extends to the world. John 3:16 declares, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." God's desire is not that some predetermined portion of humanity perish while salvation is withheld from everyone else. Second Peter 3:9 says that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." First Timothy 2:3-4 says that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The universal nature of God's saving desire is unmistakable. The Gospel invitation is genuine because God genuinely desires the salvation of mankind, and the sacrifice of Christ was not restricted to some predetermined class of people to the exclusion of everyone else.

Jesus gave Himself for everyone. Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus came to "taste death for everyone." First Timothy 2:6 says that He "gave Himself a ransom for all." First John 2:2 declares that He is "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." John the Baptist identified Jesus in John 1:29 as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." These passages leave no room for the idea that the sacrifice of Christ was intended only for a select portion of humanity. Christ died for all, and because Christ died for all, the Gospel announcing His death, burial, resurrection, and saving power must be proclaimed to all. Every human being we meet is someone for whom Jesus died.

The invitation of Christ is therefore open to all. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden." Revelation 22:17 says, "Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." Acts 2:21 declares, "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." God does not offer salvation on the basis of nationality, wealth, ancestry, or social standing. No one receives a preferred Gospel because of who his parents were, where he was born, what language he speaks, or what position he occupies in society. The same Christ calls all people through the same Gospel, and the same saving message is extended to every person.

The same Gospel conditions therefore apply to everyone. All must hear the Gospel according to Romans 10:17. All must believe in Christ according to John 8:24 and Mark 16:16. All must repent according to Acts 17:30, where God "commands all men everywhere to repent." All must confess faith in Christ according to Romans 10:9-10 and Acts 8:36-37. All must be baptized into Christ according to Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, and Galatians 3:27. Baptism is where one comes into Christ according to Galatians 3:27. Baptism is connected with the remission of sins according to Acts 2:38. First Peter 3:21 connects baptism with an appeal to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All who become Christians must then remain faithful to Christ according to Revelation 2:10 and Hebrews 10:23. There is not one plan of salvation for one race and another plan for another race, one Gospel for the wealthy and another Gospel for the poor, or one way of salvation for one nation and another way for another nation. There is one Gospel because there is one Savior.

Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Acts 4:12 declares, "Nor is there salvation in any other," and Romans 1:16 identifies the Gospel as God's power unto salvation. The Gospel is for every person, but every person must choose whether he will receive and obey it. The universality of the Gospel does not mean that every person will automatically be saved. The provision is universal, the invitation is universal, and the Gospel is universally available, but each individual must respond to that Gospel in obedient faith. Christ has provided salvation, God has revealed the conditions by which we receive that salvation, and every person must decide what he will do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because the Gospel is for all, we must take it to all. The hymn says, "Received ye freely, freely give, From every land they call; Unless they hear they cannot live: The Gospel is for all." Those who have received the Gospel have a responsibility to share it. Jesus said in Matthew 10:8, "Freely you have received, freely give." Paul considered himself a debtor to others in Romans 1:14, and in 1 Corinthians 9:16 he declared, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" The Gospel is too important to keep to ourselves. If we really believe that sin separates people from God, that Christ died for all, that the Gospel is God's power unto salvation, and that eternity is at stake, then evangelism cannot be treated as an insignificant or optional part of Christianity. We have received something that the entire world desperately needs, and having received it freely, we have a responsibility to give it freely.

People cannot believe a message they have never heard. Romans 10:13 says, "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved," but Paul immediately asks in

Romans 10:14, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” He continues, “And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” and then asks, “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Romans 10:17 therefore concludes, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” This captures the thought of the hymn: “Unless they hear they cannot live.” People need the Gospel, but they cannot respond to a Gospel they have never heard. They cannot believe in a Christ of whom they know nothing, and they cannot obey teaching that has never been presented to them. God has placed the Gospel into the hands of His people, and with that tremendous privilege comes a tremendous responsibility to proclaim it.

We must not simply say, “Someone else will reach them.” The hymn challenges us with the question, “For why should we be blest alone?” Jesus looked upon lost people with compassion in Matthew 9:36. He then told His disciples in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest truly is plentiful,” but He immediately added, “But the laborers are few.” Jesus instructed His disciples to pray for laborers in Matthew 9:38, but we should also be willing to become laborers ourselves. It is easy to pray that somebody will teach the lost, somebody will conduct Bible studies, somebody will invite a neighbor, somebody will reach a family, somebody will support evangelism, and somebody will carry the Gospel into another community or nation. Yet if the Gospel is for all, each of us ought to ask what part we can personally have in taking it to all.

The Great Commission belongs to the work of Christ’s people. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,” and in Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The first Christians took that commission seriously. The Gospel was preached in Jerusalem in Acts 2. It moved into Judea and Samaria as recorded in Acts 8:1-5. It reached the Gentiles in Acts 10. Through the missionary work recorded in Acts 13-20, the Gospel spread throughout Asia Minor and into Europe. Ultimately, Colossians 1:23 could speak of the Gospel as having been proclaimed throughout the known world. Those Christians did not possess our modern transportation, communication technology, printing capabilities, or electronic media, yet they understood that the Gospel was a message that had to be carried outward. They took seriously the words of Christ and carried His saving message wherever they went.

Our mission field begins wherever there are people who need Christ. It may be across the ocean. It may be across the country. It may be across the state. It may be across town. It may be across the street. It may even be across the dinner table. We must never develop the idea that evangelism is something that happens only in a distant

country. The person living next door has a soul. The person working beside us has a soul. Our friends have souls. Our family members have souls. The people we meet in our communities have souls. The nations of the world need the Gospel, but so do the people immediately around us. Wherever sin has gone, the Gospel needs to go.

The Gospel is for all because all are one human family: "Of one the Lord has made the race," as Acts 17:26 teaches. The Gospel is for all because all have the same problem: "For all have sinned," according to Romans 3:23. The Gospel is for all because Christ died for all: He tasted death "for everyone," according to Hebrews 2:9. Because the Gospel is for all, we must take it to all: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," according to Mark 16:15. These truths belong together. One Creator made humanity. Sin has become the universal human problem. Christ provided the universal remedy by dying for everyone. The Gospel therefore must be universally proclaimed so that every person has the opportunity to hear, believe, and obey it.

We must never become content merely because we have heard the Gospel. Someone else needs to hear it. Someone else needs to know Christ. Someone else needs the hope we have received. Someone else needs the opportunity to obey the Gospel. The words of the hymn ought to become more than words we sing; they ought to express the conviction by which we live. "Of one the Lord has made the race." "Where sin has gone must go His grace." "For why should we be blest alone?" "Unless they hear they cannot live." We have received the Gospel, but we dare not keep it to ourselves. The world is filled with people made by God, people who have sinned, people for whom Christ died, and people who desperately need to hear what God has done for them through His Son. Therefore, where sin has gone, the Gospel must go, because the Gospel is for all.

’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

Trust is at the heart of our relationship with God. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Biblical trust means much more than merely believing that God exists. It means believing what God has said, relying upon what God has promised, submitting to what God has commanded, and continuing faithfully even when we cannot see what lies ahead. The hymn “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” expresses these ideas beautifully when it speaks of taking Jesus at His Word, resting upon His promise, trusting His cleansing blood, receiving “life, and rest, and joy, and peace,” and having confidence that He will remain with us. Trust in Jesus, however, is not a passive faith that refuses to obey. Biblical faith acts upon what God has said. Noah trusted God enough to build the ark according to Hebrews 11:7. Abraham trusted God enough to obey when he was called to go according to Hebrews 11:8. Israel trusted God enough to walk around Jericho as God commanded according to Hebrews 11:30 and Joshua 6. Saving faith likewise trusts Christ enough to obey Him, for Hebrews 5:9 identifies Jesus as “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” This raises the great question of this lesson: Why is it so sweet to trust in Jesus?

We can trust Jesus because we can take Him at His Word. The hymn says, “Just to take Him at His word; Just to rest upon His promise; Just to know, Thus saith the Lord.” Jesus is completely trustworthy. Jesus declared in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Peter said that Christ “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” according to 1 Peter 2:22, and Titus 1:2 teaches us that God cannot lie. Therefore, when Christ speaks, we can trust what He says. We do not have to wonder whether Jesus will deceive us, mislead us, or fail to fulfill what He has promised. True trust takes Christ at His Word, and Peter provides a powerful example of this in Luke 5. The fishermen had worked all night without catching anything. Human experience told Peter that another attempt was useless. He was an experienced fisherman, he knew what had happened throughout the night, and everything he could see might have suggested that there was no reason to try again. Yet when Jesus instructed him to let down the net, Peter answered in Luke 5:5, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” That is trust. Jesus has spoken. I may not understand everything. My own reasoning may suggest something different. Nevertheless, at His Word, I will obey.

Trusting Jesus therefore means refusing to substitute human wisdom for divine revelation. Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart,” and then

immediately warns us, “lean not on your own understanding.” Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us that God’s thoughts are higher than man’s thoughts, while Jeremiah 10:23 declares, “The way of man is not in himself.” Religious truth cannot be determined merely by what feels right, what is popular, what our family has always believed, what a religious leader tells us, or what society accepts. Feelings can be mistaken, popular opinion can change, family traditions can be wrong, religious leaders are fallible, and society continually changes its standards. Our question must always be, “What has the Lord said?” If we really trust Jesus, His Word settles the matter. Trust does not demand that God’s instructions first pass the test of our personal reasoning before we obey them. Trust acknowledges that God knows more than we know, sees what we cannot see, understands what we cannot understand, and therefore has the right to direct our steps.

Because Jesus is trustworthy, we can rest upon His promises. Jesus promises rest to those who come to Him in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus promises freedom to those who abide in His Word in John 8:31-32. Jesus promises eternal life to His faithful followers in John 10:27-28. Jesus promises a prepared place for His people in John 14:1-3. Hebrews 10:23 assures us that God is faithful concerning everything He has promised. Trust therefore begins with hearing and accepting God’s Word. Romans 10:17 teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans because they received the Word eagerly and examined the Scriptures. James 1:21 tells us to receive the implanted Word with meekness, but verse 22 reminds us that hearing must lead to doing. It is not enough to hear Christ’s promises and admire them. It is not enough to hear His commands and discuss them. If Jesus has spoken, we can take Him at His Word, and taking Him at His Word means trusting Him enough to act upon what He has said.

We can also trust Jesus because His blood can cleanse us from sin. The hymn says, “O how sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to trust His cleansing blood.” Our greatest problem is sin. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Isaiah 59:1-2 teaches that sin separates man from God, and Romans 6:23 warns us that “the wages of sin is death.” We cannot remove our own sins by our own goodness. No amount of good behavior can go backward and erase sins already committed. We cannot save ourselves through human achievement, personal morality, religious accomplishments, or our own merits. We needed a sacrifice that we could never provide for ourselves, and Jesus provided that sacrifice. He came, according to Matthew 20:28, “to give His life a ransom for many.” First Peter 2:24 teaches that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Ephesians 1:7 says, “In Him we have redemption through His

blood, the forgiveness of sins." First John 1:7 says that the blood of Jesus Christ "cleanses us from all sin," and 1 Peter 1:18-19 teaches that we are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ." Our hope therefore is not in our own goodness, but in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Trusting the blood of Christ does not mean separating faith from obedience. Scripture never teaches that trusting Jesus means refusing to do what Jesus commands. Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus is "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him," while James 2:17 and 26 teaches that faith without works is dead. Obedience does not earn salvation. We could never perform enough good works to place God in our debt or purchase the forgiveness of a single sin. Obedience is instead the response of a faith that takes Jesus at His Word. If we claim to trust Christ while deliberately refusing His commands, our actions contradict our profession. Genuine trust says that because Jesus is Lord, because His Word is true, and because He knows the way of salvation, we will submit ourselves to the way He has revealed.

We must therefore trust Jesus concerning how we receive the benefits of His saving blood. We must hear the Gospel according to Romans 10:17. We must believe in Jesus Christ according to John 8:24 and Mark 16:16. We must repent of sin according to Luke 13:3 and Acts 17:30. We must confess Christ according to Romans 10:9-10 and Acts 8:36-37. We must be baptized into Christ according to Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, and Galatians 3:27. Saul was told in Acts 22:16, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Romans 6:3-4 teaches that in baptism we are united with Christ's death, while 1 Peter 3:21 teaches that baptism saves through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not through any power inherent in water. Having been united with Christ, we rise to walk in newness of life according to Romans 6:4. None of this places confidence in ourselves. We are not trusting water, human merit, or a religious ritual to save us. We are trusting Jesus enough to receive His salvation in the way He has commanded.

Trust says, "If Jesus commands it, I will do it." Naaman had to trust God's instruction enough to wash in the Jordan according to 2 Kings 5:10-14. The water itself possessed no miraculous cleansing power independent of God, but Naaman had to submit to what God told him to do before he received the promised cleansing. The people on Pentecost had to trust the Gospel enough to repent and be baptized according to Acts 2:37-41. The Ethiopian trusted the Gospel enough to stop the chariot and be baptized according to Acts 8:35-39. The Philippian jailer trusted the Lord enough to

obey that very night according to Acts 16:30-34. In every case, genuine trust produced obedient action. We do not trust ourselves to save ourselves. We trust the Savior enough to submit to His way of salvation. There is an enormous difference between attempting to earn salvation through our works and obeying the Savior because we trust His Word. Biblical faith does the latter.

We can trust Jesus to give us what sin and self never can. The hymn expresses this beautifully: "Just from sin and self to cease; Just from Jesus simply taking Life, and rest, and joy, and peace." Following Jesus requires turning away from self. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself." He must "take up his cross daily," and he must "follow Me." Christianity is not merely adding Jesus to a self-centered life. It is not an arrangement in which we continue to live entirely for ourselves while occasionally adding religious activities. We surrender ourselves to His lordship. Trust means that we stop treating ourselves as the final authority over our lives and begin allowing Christ to determine who we are, what we value, what we pursue, and how we live. The call to follow Jesus is therefore a call to cease trusting sin and self and to place our confidence in Him.

Jesus gives us life. He said in John 10:10 that He came that we "may have life" and have it abundantly. In John 11:25 Christ declared Himself to be "the resurrection and the life." First John 5:11-12 teaches that eternal life is found in God's Son, and Ephesians 2:4-6 shows that outside of Christ there is spiritual death while in Christ there is life. Sin promises life while leading ultimately to death, but Jesus gives the life that sin can never provide. The life Jesus gives is more than mere physical existence. It is spiritual life, reconciliation with God, fellowship with Him, and ultimately the hope of eternal life. When we cease trusting ourselves and come to Christ on His terms, we discover that the One who asks us to surrender our lives is actually the One who alone can give us true life.

Jesus also gives us rest. In Matthew 11:28 He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus does not promise a life without burdens. Becoming a Christian does not mean that difficulties, grief, sickness, disappointment, opposition, and suffering suddenly disappear. What Jesus promises is that we do not bear those burdens alone. First Peter 5:7 tells us that we can cast our cares upon God because He cares for us. The Christian can carry burdens while knowing that those burdens are not greater than the Lord. We can face uncertainty without believing that everything depends entirely upon our own strength. We can bring our fears,

concerns, sorrows, and needs before God because we know that He cares for us. This is a rest that the world cannot manufacture because it is rooted in confidence in God.

Jesus gives us joy. In John 15:11 Jesus expressed His desire that His joy remain in His disciples. Philippians 4:4 says that Christians can "rejoice in the Lord always." Our joy is not dependent entirely upon favorable circumstances. If our joy depends upon everything around us going exactly as we want, then our joy will constantly disappear because circumstances constantly change. Christian joy rests upon something deeper. James 1:2-4 teaches that even trials can be faced with spiritual joy because of what those trials produce. That does not mean pain becomes pleasant or suffering ceases to hurt. It means that the Christian can see beyond the immediate difficulty and understand that God can use trials to produce endurance and spiritual maturity. The world cannot guarantee that everything will go well, but Christ can give us a joy that remains even when everything around us is difficult.

Jesus gives us peace. He said in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you." Romans 5:1 teaches that through justification we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, and Philippians 4:6-7 teaches that God's peace can guard our hearts and minds in Christ. This peace does not mean that every problem disappears. It means that our confidence rests in One greater than our circumstances. There is peace in knowing that we have been reconciled to God. There is peace in knowing that God hears our prayers. There is peace in knowing that our future is ultimately in His hands. There is peace in knowing that whatever happens in this life, faithfulness to Christ leads toward something far greater beyond this life. The peace Jesus provides is therefore not the absence of trouble but confidence in the presence and promises of God in the midst of trouble.

The world promises what only Christ can truly provide. Sin promises pleasure but produces death according to Romans 6:21-23. Material things cannot satisfy the soul, as Jesus demonstrated in Luke 12:15-21 with the rich man who accumulated possessions while neglecting his soul. Human wisdom cannot reconcile us to God according to 1 Corinthians 1:20-21. Jesus offers what the world cannot give: life, rest, joy, and peace. Sin cannot give lasting life. Self cannot provide true spiritual rest. Possessions cannot guarantee joy. Human wisdom cannot establish peace with God. When we cease trusting sin and self, we discover what it means truly to trust the Savior.

We can also trust Jesus to be with us to the end. The hymn says, "I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee, Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend; And I know that Thou art with me,

Wilt be with me to the end." Jesus has promised to remain with His people. After giving the Great Commission, He promised in Matthew 28:20, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Hebrews 13:5 records God's promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Therefore, Hebrews 13:6 says that we may confidently declare, "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear." The Christian life is not a journey upon which Christ sends us forward and then abandons us. The One who calls us to follow Him also promises His continuing presence.

We can trust Jesus when life is difficult. Paul faced hardship, persecution, danger, and uncertainty, as 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 vividly records. Yet Paul could say in 2 Timothy 4:17, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me." God's people are never promised exemption from suffering. Second Timothy 3:12 warns that those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Romans 8:35-39, however, assures us that suffering cannot separate faithful Christians from the love of God in Christ. Difficulty does not mean that Jesus has abandoned us. Pain does not mean that His promises have failed. Paul knew what it was to suffer, but he also knew what it was to experience the Lord's sustaining strength in suffering. We can trust Christ not because He promises that every road will be easy, but because He promises that we never have to walk the difficult road without Him.

We can trust Jesus when we are tempted. Hebrews 4:15 teaches that Jesus understands temptation because He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Therefore, Hebrews 4:16 tells us that we may "come boldly to the throne of grace." Jesus does not look upon human temptation without understanding the struggle. He faced temptation and remained without sin. First Corinthians 10:13 also assures us that God provides a way of escape from temptation. Temptation may be powerful, but it is never greater than God. We do not have to surrender to sin simply because temptation comes. We can look to Christ, seek God's help, take the way of escape He provides, and trust Him to give us what we need to remain faithful.

We can trust Jesus when we face death. Jesus conquered death through His resurrection according to 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. Because Christ lives, death does not have the final word. Paul could say in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Faithful Christians can look forward to the crown of life according to Revelation 2:10. Paul approached death knowing whom he had trusted, declaring in 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." That is trust carried all the way to the edge of eternity. The Christian does not have to pretend that death is insignificant. Death

is an enemy, but it is an enemy Christ has conquered. Therefore, the same Jesus whom we trust in life is the Jesus whom we can trust when life comes to its end.

Trust must continue throughout the Christian life. We begin by faith, and we continue by faith. Hebrews 10:19-23 calls us to draw near and to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering," because the One who promised is faithful. Hebrews 12:1 tells us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us," and verse 2 tells us that we do so while "looking unto Jesus." Revelation 2:10 teaches that faithfulness must continue even unto death. The Christian life is not one moment of trust followed by a lifetime of spiritual indifference. We trusted Christ when we obeyed the Gospel, and we must continue trusting Him every day thereafter. We trust Him in our decisions, our temptations, our difficulties, our disappointments, our service, our worship, our relationships, our suffering, and ultimately our death. The One we trust at the beginning is the One we can trust all the way to the end.

We can trust Jesus because we can take Him at His Word. Peter's words in Luke 5:5 beautifully summarize that trust: "Nevertheless at Your word I will." We can trust Jesus because His blood can cleanse us from sin, for 1 John 1:7 says, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." We can trust Jesus to give what sin and self never can: life, rest, joy, and peace. We can trust Jesus to be with us to the end, because He has promised in Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always." The great question, however, is personal. Do you trust Jesus enough to take Him at His Word? Do you trust Jesus enough to surrender your sin? Do you trust Jesus enough to obey His Gospel? Do you trust Jesus enough to follow Him faithfully to the end? Those questions reveal whether our trust is merely something we profess with our lips or something that actually directs our lives.

Biblical trust does not say, "I believe in Jesus, therefore it does not matter what I do." Biblical trust says, "Because I believe Jesus, I will do what Jesus says." That is the faith demonstrated throughout Hebrews 11. By faith, Noah prepared according to Hebrews 11:7. By faith, Abraham obeyed according to Hebrews 11:8. By faith, Israel passed through the Red Sea according to Hebrews 11:29. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell after Israel followed God's instructions according to Hebrews 11:30. In every example, faith trusted God enough to act upon His Word. That is why it truly is sweet to trust in Jesus. We can trust His Word. We can trust His saving blood. We can trust His promises. We can trust His presence. We can trust Him when the way is clear and when the way ahead is uncertain. We can trust Him in life, in suffering, in temptation, and in death. We can trust Him when we first obey the Gospel, we can trust Him throughout the

Christian race, and we can trust Him as we approach eternity. We can trust Him all the way to the end.

God, Give Us Christian Homes!

One of God's greatest earthly blessings is the home. The home did not originate with human society, nor was it invented by government or culture. Marriage and the home originated with God, as Genesis 2:18-24 demonstrates. Before there was civil government, there was the home. Before there was the nation of Israel, there was the home. Because God designed the home, God has the right to determine how the home should function. When Jesus discussed marriage in Matthew 19:4-6, He returned to God's original design and declared, "What God has joined together, let not man separate." Scripture gives instruction concerning husbands in Ephesians 5:25-33, wives in Ephesians 5:22-24 and verse 33, fathers in Ephesians 6:4, mothers in Titus 2:4-5, and children in Ephesians 6:1-3. God has not left the family without direction. The One who established the home has revealed how the people within that home are to live, love, lead, submit, teach, obey, and serve Him.

Yet merely having a house does not mean that we have a Christian home. A house can contain Bibles without being governed by the Bible. A family can attend worship while Christ has little influence on its life during the rest of the week. A Christian home is one in which God's Word shapes our beliefs, our decisions, our priorities, our marriages, our parenting, and our conduct. The hymn "God, Give Us Christian Homes!" expresses a prayer desperately needed in every generation. We need homes where the Bible is loved and taught, homes where fathers are true and strong, homes where mothers demonstrate God's way, and homes where children are led to know Christ. The prayer expressed in that hymn should become the determination of every family, the determination Joshua expressed so powerfully in Joshua 24:15: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

We need homes built upon the Word of God, "Homes where the Bible is loved and taught, Homes where the Master's will is sought." A Christian home must have the right foundation. Psalm 127:1 declares, "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Jesus described two builders in Matthew 7:24-27. Both men heard His words, but the wise man heard those words and did them, while the foolish man heard those words and did not do them. Every home is being built upon something. Some homes are built upon human wisdom, some upon cultural expectations, some upon material success, some upon personal feelings, and some upon the revealed will of God. Only God's foundation will withstand life's storms. Circumstances change, cultures change, human opinions change, financial conditions change, and feelings change, but

the Word of God remains the sure foundation upon which a truly Christian home can be built.

The Bible should therefore be loved in our homes. Psalm 1:2 describes the righteous man as one who delights "in the law of the LORD," while the psalmist exclaimed in Psalm 119:97, "Oh, how I love Your law!" God's Word should not be treated merely as a decoration in the house, something carried to worship, or something opened only during a crisis. God's Word should shape daily life. A Bible sitting unopened on a table does not make a home Christian any more than merely owning a Bible makes an individual faithful. The Scriptures must be read, respected, believed, discussed, and obeyed. Children should grow up recognizing that the Bible matters to their parents, not simply because their parents say that it matters, but because they see its teaching actually directing the family's decisions and priorities.

The Bible should also be taught in our homes. God instructed Israel concerning His words in Deuteronomy 6:7, "You shall teach them diligently to your children." They were to talk about those words "when you sit in your house," "when you walk by the way," "when you lie down," and "when you rise up." Spiritual instruction was woven into everyday family life. Timothy illustrates the tremendous influence of biblical teaching in the home. According to 2 Timothy 3:15, he had known the Holy Scriptures "from childhood," and in 2 Timothy 1:5 Paul remembered the genuine faith that had first dwelt in Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Scripture was not something Timothy first encountered when he became an adult. Its influence had been present from his childhood, and the godly influence within his family helped prepare him for a lifetime of faithful service.

The Master's will must be sought in the decisions of our homes. Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" A Christian home must continually ask, "What does God say about our marriage? What does God say about raising our children? What does God say about money? What does God say about morality? What does God say about worship? What does God say about our priorities?" Matthew 6:33 gives the governing principle: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Christ must be more than an occasional guest in our homes. His Word should govern the home, His will should direct the home, His example should influence the home, and His kingdom should have priority in the home. A Christian home begins when the Word of God becomes the foundation of the home.

We also need homes with godly fathers, "Homes where the father is true and strong, Homes that are free from the blight of wrong." God has given fathers a tremendous responsibility. Fathers are specifically addressed in Ephesians 6:4: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath," but instead, "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." A father's responsibility involves far more than providing food, clothing, housing, and material possessions. Those things are important, but a father has a responsibility for the spiritual training of his children. A man could provide his children with every material advantage this world offers and still fail them in the area that matters most if he neglects their souls. God expects fathers to take seriously their responsibility to lead their children toward Him.

A godly father must be true. His Christianity should be genuine because children quickly recognize inconsistency. A father cannot effectively teach honesty while practicing dishonesty, purity while embracing impurity, kindness while treating his family harshly, faithfulness while making worship optional, or respect for Scripture while ignoring Scripture at home. Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 to be "an example to the believers," and the same principle applies powerfully to fathers. Children need to see in their father an example that supports the truths he teaches. The lessons children remember are not merely those spoken across a table or heard in a Bible class. They also remember what they see. If a father tells his children that God comes first while repeatedly demonstrating through his choices that everything else comes before God, his conduct may speak more loudly than his words.

A godly father must also be strong in the right way. Biblical strength is not harshness, and biblical leadership is not tyranny. Husbands are commanded in Ephesians 5:25, "Love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Christlike leadership is loving, sacrificial, responsible, faithful, and servant-minded. First Peter 3:7 commands husbands to dwell with their wives "with understanding" and to give them honor. Biblical leadership therefore has nothing to do with selfish domination. A husband who seeks to lead as Christ directs will be concerned about the spiritual and physical well-being of his wife and family. He will sacrifice rather than merely demand. He will serve rather than merely insist upon being served. His strength will be demonstrated through faithfulness, integrity, responsibility, self-control, courage, and sacrificial love.

A father should lead his family toward God. Joshua declared in Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Abraham was commended in Genesis 18:19 because God knew that he would command his children and his household after

him to keep the way of the LORD. Fathers should lead by praying, studying Scripture, worshiping faithfully, demonstrating integrity, repenting when they are wrong, and showing their children that serving God comes first. A father does not have to pretend that he never makes mistakes in order to provide a godly example. In fact, when he is wrong, one of the most powerful examples he can provide is humbly admitting that he was wrong and correcting it. His family should see that his commitment to God is genuine enough to govern not only his public conduct but also his private conduct within the home.

Fathers must guard their homes against what the hymn calls "the blight of wrong." Sin destroys. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Fathers should therefore be concerned about what enters their homes through entertainment, technology, speech, attitudes, relationships, and even their own examples. Job demonstrated concern about the spiritual welfare of his children in Job 1:5. A father should care about more than whether his children succeed in this world. He should care whether they are prepared for eternity. Academic achievement is valuable, employment is important, and the ability to function successfully in society matters, but none of those things compares with the value of a soul. The greatest inheritance a father can leave is not money or possessions, but an example of faithful devotion to God.

We also need homes with godly mothers, "Homes where the mother, in caring quest, Strives to show others Your way is best, Homes where the Lord is an honored guest." Scripture honors the influence of godly women in the home. Proverbs describes the worthy woman in Proverbs 31:28 by saying, "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." Proverbs 31:27 says that she watches over the ways of her household, while verse 26 declares, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness." Scripture does not belittle the influence of a godly wife and mother. It presents that influence as honorable, valuable, and capable of producing blessings that may continue far beyond what she can presently see.

Godly mothers teach through both words and example. Timothy again provides an excellent illustration. Paul remembered "the genuine faith" that first dwelt in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice and afterward in Timothy himself, according to 2 Timothy 1:5. Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures from childhood according to 2 Timothy 3:14-15. Never underestimate the spiritual influence of a godly mother. A mother who teaches Scripture, demonstrates faith, prays, worships faithfully, shows kindness, exercises self-control, practices purity, and places God first is planting seeds that may bear fruit for generations. Lois influenced Eunice, Eunice influenced Timothy,

and Timothy became a faithful servant and preacher of the Gospel. A mother may never fully know in this life how far the influence of her faithfulness will reach.

Older women are instructed to teach younger women concerning the home. Titus 2:3-5 describes this responsibility and teaches that younger women were to be taught to love their husbands, love their children, be discreet, be chaste, be homemakers, be good, and be obedient to their own husbands. These responsibilities are honorable in the sight of God. A culture may change its opinions about the home, marriage, motherhood, and the roles God has established, but the Christian asks what God has revealed. God places tremendous value upon the work performed within the home and upon the influence a godly woman exercises there.

A godly wife and mother demonstrates that God's way is best. Her faith should be visible in her conduct. First Peter 3:1-4 emphasizes the power of godly conduct, and verse 4 describes "the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" as precious in God's sight. Godliness is demonstrated through patience, purity, kindness, self-control, faithfulness, and love. These qualities cannot merely be discussed; they must be lived. A mother teaches by what she says, but she also teaches by how she reacts when circumstances are difficult, how she treats her husband and children, how she speaks about others, how she handles disappointment, how she responds to sin, and how seriously she takes her relationship with God.

Husbands and wives must work together in building a Christian home. God's design is not competition between husband and wife. Genesis 2:24 says that husband and wife are "one flesh." The husband is commanded to love his wife according to Ephesians 5:25, while the wife is commanded to respect her husband according to Ephesians 5:33. Both should be committed to Christ, to one another, to their children, and to the spiritual health of the family. A Christian marriage is not supposed to be a contest for superiority. Husband and wife have responsibilities given by God, and both should seek the spiritual welfare of the family. When husband and wife are united in their devotion to Christ, they provide their children with a powerful picture of God's design for the home. A godly mother possesses an influence that may reach far beyond what she ever sees in this life.

We need homes where children are led to know Christ, "Homes where the children are led to know Christ in His beauty who loves them so." Children are a blessing entrusted to parents. Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD." Parents are therefore stewards of something precious. Children need more than food, clothing, education, recreation, and opportunities. Parents naturally want to

provide these things, but above everything else, children need spiritual instruction. A child can receive an excellent education, participate in every available activity, enjoy every material advantage, and be prepared for a successful career while still being spiritually unprepared for eternity. The greatest responsibility parents possess is therefore not merely preparing children to live successfully in this world, but helping prepare them for the world to come.

Children must be led toward God. Parents cannot obey the Gospel for their children, and faith cannot simply be inherited from parents. Each person must ultimately choose whether to serve God, as Joshua 24:15 demonstrates. Nevertheless, parents can create an environment in which their children hear God's Word, see Christianity practiced, learn to pray, learn reverence for God, understand sin and salvation, see the importance of the church, and learn to put God's kingdom first. Parents cannot make the ultimate spiritual decision for their children, but they can have an enormous influence upon the environment in which those decisions will eventually be made. They can show their children through both teaching and example that God is real, Scripture is authoritative, worship matters, the church matters, sin is serious, salvation is precious, and Heaven is worth seeking above everything this world offers.

Parents must teach children God's Word. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 emphasizes diligent instruction. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to bring children up "in the training and admonition of the Lord." Second Timothy 3:15 reminds us that Timothy knew Scripture from childhood. Bible teaching cannot be outsourced entirely to Bible class teachers, preachers, or Christian friends. The congregation can reinforce what parents teach, and faithful teachers can have an enormous positive influence, but parents bear a unique responsibility in the home. A few hours spent at the church building cannot replace the spiritual influence that exists throughout the remainder of the week. Parents have opportunities in ordinary conversations, family decisions, difficulties, questions, meals, travel, discipline, and everyday life to teach their children how the Word of God applies.

Children should also see genuine Christianity in their parents. They should see their parents pray according to the principle of Philippians 4:6. They should see their parents study God's Word in keeping with 2 Timothy 2:15. They should see their parents worship faithfully according to Hebrews 10:24-25. They should see their parents forgive one another according to Colossians 3:13. They should see their parents admit when they are wrong according to James 5:16. They should see their parents put the kingdom first according to Matthew 6:33. Children should not receive the impression that Christianity is merely something their family does at certain appointed times. They should see that

Christianity governs the family's entire life. When parents make mistakes, children should see repentance. When difficulties arise, children should see prayer. When decisions must be made, children should see respect for Scripture. When Sunday comes, they should see that worship is a priority rather than an inconvenience.

Parents must discipline with love and wisdom. Proverbs 13:24 teaches that discipline is part of loving instruction, yet Ephesians 6:4 warns fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. Colossians 3:21 similarly says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Biblical discipline seeks correction, not humiliation. The goal is not merely well-behaved children. The greater goal is children whose hearts learn to respect God and His authority. Discipline should therefore never be merely the uncontrolled expression of parental anger. It should be administered with the child's ultimate good in mind. Parents are seeking to teach obedience, responsibility, self-control, and respect for rightful authority, all while demonstrating the love and wisdom that God expects within the home.

Children also have responsibilities in the Christian home. Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," and verse 2 commands, "Honor your father and mother." Jesus Himself demonstrated submission to Joseph and Mary while growing up, as Luke 2:51 records. God expects children to learn obedience, honor, respect, responsibility, and reverence for God. The Christian home is therefore not a place in which parents have responsibilities while children have none. Children are being trained to understand authority, responsibility, respect, and obedience, and these lessons help prepare them for their own relationship with God.

Our greatest desire should be to see our children choose Christ for themselves. John wrote in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." There are many things parents naturally want for their children. We want them to have health, education, good employment, financial stability, and happiness. None of those desires is necessarily wrong, but what will any earthly success matter if they lose their souls? Jesus asked in Matthew 16:26 what a man would profit if he gained the whole world and lost his own soul. Our greatest goal should not merely be to raise successful children, but to lead them toward becoming faithful servants of Jesus Christ. A child who possesses every earthly advantage but loses his soul has ultimately lost everything, while a child who faithfully follows Christ possesses a treasure greater than anything this world can provide.

God, give us homes built upon Your Word, because “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it,” according to Psalm 127:1. God, give us homes with godly fathers, fathers who lovingly lead their families toward Heaven and fulfill the responsibility described in Ephesians 6:4. God, give us homes with godly mothers, mothers whose faith and example influence generations as the faith of Lois and Eunice influenced Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:5. God, give us homes where children are led to know Christ, children who are taught the Scriptures from their earliest years as Timothy was according to 2 Timothy 3:15. We cannot control what every family in our nation will do. We cannot control what society will approve. We cannot control what entertainment will promote. We cannot control what the culture will redefine. But each family can make Joshua’s determination: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Christian homes do not happen accidentally. Someone must teach the Bible. Someone must seek the Master’s will. Someone must choose righteousness over wrong. Someone must demonstrate that God’s way is best. Someone must lead the children toward Christ. Someone must decide that the Lord will be honored in this home. A Christian home requires deliberate commitment to God’s design and daily submission to His Word. It requires husbands and wives who take their God-given responsibilities seriously, fathers who lead faithfully, mothers who exercise godly influence, parents who teach their children, and children who learn obedience and reverence. It requires families that understand that earthly success is temporary but souls are eternal.

And so our prayer must also become our purpose: God, give us Christian homes! Give us homes where Your Word is loved, homes where Your will is obeyed, homes where husbands and wives love one another, homes where fathers lead faithfully, homes where mothers exercise godly influence, homes where children are taught the truth, homes where Christ is honored, and homes that are preparing every member of the family for Heaven. May we not merely sing about such homes or admire the idea of such homes. May we determine to build them. May the Bible be their foundation, Christ be their Lord, righteousness be their character, love be their spirit, Heaven be their destination, and may every family have the courage and conviction to say with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Onward, Christian Soldiers!

The New Testament frequently describes the Christian life in terms of warfare. Paul told Timothy to "wage the good warfare" in 1 Timothy 1:18, and he told him in 2 Timothy 2:3 to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." As Paul approached the end of his own life, he could look back upon his service to Christ and say in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight." Christians are commanded in Ephesians 6:11 to put on "the whole armor of God." Yet we must immediately understand the nature of this warfare. Christianity does not advance by physical violence. Jesus told Pilate in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world." Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 10:3, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh," and then added in verse 4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." Our enemies are spiritual: Satan, sin, error, temptation, worldliness, and everything that opposes the truth and will of God. The hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" uses this biblical imagery to call Christians to courage, unity, faithfulness, and victory. Christ goes before us, Satan stands against us, the church stands together, and victory belongs to Christ. The Christian life is not a playground. It is a battleground. There is a cause worth defending, an enemy worth resisting, a faith worth keeping, and a victory worth pursuing. Therefore, the call is clear: "Onward, Christian soldiers!"

We must go onward because Christ our Commander goes before us. The hymn says, "Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before! Christ, the royal Master, Leads against the foe." Jesus Christ is our King and Commander. Jesus possesses "all authority" in heaven and on earth according to Matthew 28:18. God has made Him "both Lord and Christ" according to Acts 2:36. First Timothy 6:15 describes Him as "King of kings and Lord of lords," and Ephesians 1:20-23 teaches that all things have been placed under His feet and that He is Head over the church. The Christian therefore does not determine his own marching orders. Christ commands, and we follow. Christianity is not about deciding what we would like Christ to say and then attempting to make His Word agree with our desires. If Jesus is truly our Lord and Commander, then His authority governs the direction in which we march.

A good soldier seeks to please his commander. Second Timothy 2:3 says, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." The following verse says, "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life." Why? Paul answers, "That he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." That should change the fundamental question by which we make decisions. The question should not

be, “What pleases me?” It should not be, “What is popular?” It should not be, “What does society approve?” The question must be, “What pleases Christ?” A soldier who recognizes the authority of his commander does not regard his own personal preferences as the final standard. In the same way, Christians belong to Jesus Christ. Our lives, decisions, priorities, worship, morality, teaching, and service must be governed by the desire to please the One who enlisted us as His soldiers.

Christ has already gone before us. He faced temptation and overcame it according to Matthew 4:1-11. He faced rejection according to John 1:11. He faced opposition, as Hebrews 12:3 reminds us. He faced suffering according to 1 Peter 2:21-23. He faced death and became obedient even to the point of death according to Philippians 2:8. Yet death did not defeat Him, because Acts 2:24 declares that God raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death. The Commander whom we follow is not One who sends His soldiers into a struggle He knows nothing about. Jesus has faced temptation, rejection, opposition, suffering, and death, and He has overcome. Therefore, when we are called to endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we follow One who has already walked the difficult road before us.

The cross stands at the heart of our cause. Paul determined in 1 Corinthians 2:2 to preach “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” First Corinthians 1:18 says that the message of the cross is “the power of God” to those who are being saved. Ephesians 2:16 teaches that through the cross Christ reconciles sinners to God, and Hebrews 2:14 teaches that through His death Christ destroyed the power of the one who had the power of death. Therefore, when the hymn pictures “the cross of Jesus going on before,” our confidence is not in ourselves. Our confidence is in the crucified and risen Christ. We do not march because we believe ourselves to be strong enough, wise enough, or powerful enough to achieve spiritual victory on our own. We march because Jesus Christ died, rose again, reigns as King, and leads His people.

Following Christ requires personal surrender. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself,” and then commanded that he “take up his cross daily” and “follow Me.” A soldier cannot follow the Commander while insisting upon marching in his own direction. We cannot claim that Jesus is our Lord while continually reserving the right to disregard His commands whenever they conflict with our desires. Self-denial means that Christ’s will takes precedence over our own. Taking up the cross means accepting the demands and sacrifices involved in following Him. Following Him means going where He directs through His Word. Christ leads. His Word commands. His cross goes before us. Our responsibility is to follow.

We must also go onward because we have an enemy to resist and a victory to win. The hymn says, “At the sign of triumph Satan’s host doth flee; On, then, Christian soldiers, On to victory!” Scripture identifies our true enemy. First Peter 5:8 warns, “Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Jesus described Satan in John 8:44 as a murderer, a liar, and the father of lies. Matthew 4:3 identifies Satan as “the tempter.” Second Corinthians 4:4 teaches that he seeks to blind people to the Gospel, while Ephesians 6:11 warns about the “wiles,” or schemes, of the devil against Christians. Satan is not a harmless figure or merely a symbol for unpleasant things. Scripture presents him as a real spiritual adversary actively opposed to God, truth, righteousness, and the salvation of souls. The Christian who forgets that he has an enemy places himself in spiritual danger.

Our battle is spiritual. Ephesians 6:12 says, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood,” but against spiritual wickedness. Therefore, other human beings are not our ultimate enemy. We do not defeat error by hating the person who believes it, and we do not defeat sin through physical force. We fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons. This distinction is essential to understanding biblical warfare. Christians may oppose false teaching without hatred toward those who have been deceived by it. We may stand firmly against sin while desiring the salvation of sinners. The enemy seeks to use lies, temptation, worldliness, error, and sin to draw people away from God, and therefore the battle must be fought with the spiritual weapons God Himself supplies.

God provides the armor necessary for the battle. Ephesians 6:14 speaks of the belt of truth, reminding us that we must know truth, just as Jesus taught in John 8:31-32. The same verse speaks of the breastplate of righteousness, reminding us that we must live righteous lives according to the principle expressed in 1 John 3:7. Ephesians 6:15 describes feet prepared with the Gospel of peace, and Romans 10:15 reminds us that we must be ready to carry the Gospel. Ephesians 6:16 gives us the shield of faith, by which Satan’s fiery darts can be extinguished. Ephesians 6:17 speaks of the helmet of salvation, while 1 Thessalonians 5:8 reminds us that our hope protects us in the struggle. Ephesians 6:17 also identifies the sword of the Spirit as the Word of God, and Jesus Himself demonstrated its use when He answered Satan’s temptations with Scripture in Matthew 4:4, 7, and 10. Finally, Ephesians 6:18 emphasizes prayer. The Christian soldier never fights in his own strength. Truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer are all essential equipment for the spiritual battle.

Satan must be resisted. James 4:7 commands, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” First Peter 5:9 likewise says, “Resist him, steadfast in the faith.” We resist Satan

by knowing the truth, rejecting temptation, practicing righteousness, using God's Word, praying, and remaining watchful. We cannot resist an enemy whose schemes we willingly embrace. We cannot resist falsehood while refusing to learn truth. We cannot resist temptation while deliberately placing ourselves in situations designed to strengthen temptation. We cannot resist worldliness while filling our minds continually with the thinking of the world. Resistance requires deliberate spiritual vigilance. The Christian soldier must recognize the enemy's schemes, remain alert, and use the resources God has provided.

Victory is possible because Christ has already conquered. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Christ conquered death according to 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. First Corinthians 15:57 declares that "God...gives us the victory" through Jesus Christ. First John 5:4 says that faith is the victory that overcomes the world, and Romans 8:37 declares that Christians are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Our confidence in victory is therefore not based upon the idea that Satan is weak or that the Christian struggle is easy. Our confidence rests in Jesus Christ. The battle is real, temptation is real, suffering is real, opposition is real, and the enemy is real, but the victory Christ provides is also real.

Victory, however, requires endurance. First Timothy 6:12 commands us to "fight the good fight of faith," while Revelation 2:10 calls us to faithfulness even unto death. Paul could say at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith." Paul did not merely begin the battle. He continued fighting. He did not merely enter the race. He finished it. He did not merely receive the faith. He kept it. Christian faithfulness therefore requires endurance. We cannot surrender simply because the struggle becomes difficult. The battle is real, but so is the victory. Therefore, onward!

We must go onward together as the one body of Christ. The hymn says, "Like a mighty army Moves the church of God; Brothers, we are treading Where the saints have trod; We are not divided; All one body we, One in hope and doctrine, One in charity." The church is the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18 says that Christ is "head of the body, the church." First Corinthians 12:27 says, "You are the body of Christ, and members individually." Ephesians 4:4 declares that there is "one body," and Ephesians 5:23 identifies Christ as the Savior of the body. Christians do not march as independent soldiers with no relationship or responsibility toward one another. We belong to one body under one Head, Jesus Christ.

Every member has a place in the work. First Corinthians 12:12 reminds us that a body has many members, while Romans 12:4 teaches that every member does not perform the same function. Yet every member is important. First Corinthians 12:21 says, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'" Ephesians 4:16 shows that God intends every Christian to contribute to the work of the body. There are no unnecessary soldiers in Christ's army. Every Christian may not preach publicly, teach the same class, possess the same abilities, perform the same work, or occupy the same role, but every Christian can contribute something to the work of Christ. A healthy body functions when its members do their part, and a strong congregation likewise depends upon Christians faithfully using their opportunities and abilities in service to Christ.

Christ desires unity among His people. Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21 that His disciples "all may be one." Paul pleaded in 1 Corinthians 1:10 that Christians "all speak the same thing" and that there be "no divisions" among them. Ephesians 4:3 commands Christians to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Division is not the ideal Christ established for His people. The picture of Christians marching together as one body reflects the unity for which Jesus prayed and which the apostles commanded. Christians should not be fighting one another while the real spiritual enemy goes unopposed. We should stand together under the authority of Christ and work together for the cause He has given us.

Biblical unity is unity in revealed truth. Unity is not agreeing to ignore what Scripture teaches. Jesus prayed in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." Acts 2:42 says that the first Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Ephesians 4:4-6 gives the basis of Christian unity: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. Therefore, the hymn rightly connects being "One in hope and doctrine." Biblical unity does not ask Christians to abandon doctrine in order to achieve togetherness. The truth revealed by God is itself the foundation upon which genuine spiritual unity must be built. If Christ is our Head, then His Word must determine the faith around which His body unites.

Truth must also be joined with love. Ephesians 4:15 commands us to speak "the truth in love." First Corinthians 13:6 says that love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." Truth without love can become harsh, while love without truth becomes mere sentiment. God's people need both. We must love people enough to tell them the truth, and we must love the truth enough not to compromise it. At the same time, our defense of truth must never become an excuse for bitterness, cruelty, pride, or

hatred. Christians are called to stand firmly for revealed truth while demonstrating the love of Christ toward others.

We are following the path faithful Christians have walked before us. Hebrews 11 remembers men and women who lived by faith, and Hebrews 12:1 then tells us, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” We do not invent a new faith for every generation. Jude 3 commands us to contend “earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Second Timothy 2:2 shows our responsibility to remain faithful to apostolic teaching and pass it to others. The faith is not ours to reinvent, modernize into something fundamentally different, or replace according to the preferences of each new age. We receive the apostolic message, live by it, defend it, and pass it faithfully to the next generation. We do not march alone. We move together under one Head, according to one faith, toward one hope.

We must go onward because the final victory belongs to Christ. The hymn says, “Onward, then, ye people, Join our happy throng, Blend with ours your voices In the triumph song; Glory, laud, and honor, Unto Christ the King.” The Gospel invitation calls people to join the people of God. On Pentecost the Gospel was preached according to Acts 2:14-36. The hearers were convicted and asked in Acts 2:37, “What shall we do?” Peter commanded them in Acts 2:38 to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Acts 2:41 says, “Those who gladly received his word were baptized,” and Acts 2:47 records that the Lord added the saved to the church. The invitation of the Gospel is therefore an invitation to salvation in Jesus Christ and to become part of the body of people who belong to Him.

We enter Christ’s body through obedient faith. Faith comes by hearing God’s Word according to Romans 10:17. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ according to John 8:24. We must repent according to Acts 17:30. We confess Christ according to Romans 10:9-10. We are baptized into Christ according to Galatians 3:27. First Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Romans 6:3-4 teaches that we are united with Christ and then rise to walk in newness of life. Becoming a Christian is therefore not merely agreeing intellectually that Jesus exists. The Gospel calls us to obedient faith, and through that obedient response we enter Christ and become members of His body, ready to walk in a new life under His authority.

The Christian must then keep marching forward. Christianity has no command to retreat. Paul said in Philippians 3:14, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Hebrews 10:39 says, “We are not of those who draw back

to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." Jesus calls us to faithfulness unto death in Revelation 2:10. There will be moments when retreat seems easier than faithfulness, when compromise seems easier than conviction, when silence seems easier than defending truth, and when giving up seems easier than endurance. But the command remains onward. The Christian life moves toward a goal, and we must keep pressing toward it.

One day the battle will end. Temptation will end. Persecution will end. Suffering will end. Death will end. Revelation 14:13 promises that God's faithful people will rest from their labors. The Christian battle is not eternal. There is a day coming when the struggle will be finished and God's faithful people will enter their rest. That hope gives us courage to continue fighting now. We endure the temporary struggle because we know it is leading toward an eternal victory.

The final triumph belongs to Christ. Revelation presents Christ as the victorious King. Revelation 11:15 declares, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." Revelation 17:14 says that the Lamb will overcome His enemies "for He is Lord of lords and King of kings." First Corinthians 15:25 teaches that Christ will reign until every enemy has been placed beneath His feet, and verse 26 declares, "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." Every enemy of Christ will ultimately fall. Sin will not win. Satan will not win. Error will not win. Death will not win. Christ will be victorious.

Therefore, all glory belongs to Christ our King. The glory does not belong to the soldier, human leaders, human organizations, or ourselves. First Corinthians 15:57 says that victory comes through Jesus Christ: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore, the proper response is the one expressed in 1 Peter 5:11: "To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." We march because our King has already shown us how the battle ends. Christ wins. Our confidence is not that we are powerful enough to guarantee the outcome, but that we belong to the King whose victory is certain.

Onward, because Christ our Commander goes before us. Second Timothy 2:3 says, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Onward, because we have an enemy to resist and a victory to win. James 4:7 commands, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Onward, together as the one body of Christ, because Ephesians 4:4 declares, "There is one body." Onward, because the final victory belongs to Christ, for 1 Corinthians 15:57 declares, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the

victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." These are not merely lines in a hymn. They describe the calling, conflict, fellowship, endurance, and hope of the Christian life.

The Christian life is not a call to sit still. There is truth to defend. There is temptation to resist. There is Gospel to proclaim. There are souls to reach. There are brethren to encourage. There is work to accomplish. There is a race to finish. There is a faith to keep. We cannot afford to retreat. We cannot surrender to the world. We cannot compromise the truth. We cannot abandon the battlefield. We cannot become divided among ourselves. We must put on the whole armor of God and stand, just as Ephesians 6:10-18 commands. The Christian life requires courage, vigilance, endurance, unity, faithfulness, and complete dependence upon the strength God provides.

And when the struggle becomes difficult, remember who goes before us. Christ is our King. Christ is our Commander. Christ has conquered sin and death. Christ has provided our armor. Christ has given us His Word. Christ has promised the crown. So let the words of the hymn become the determination of our lives: "Onward, Christian soldiers!" Christ before us. The Word within us. The armor upon us. The brethren beside us. The enemy against us. And victory through Christ awaiting us. Therefore, let us hear and obey the charge of 1 Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life."

Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All

We have reached the final night of this Gospel Meeting, but the Christian life reminds us that reaching the end matters. It is good to begin, it is necessary to continue, and it is essential to finish faithfully. Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, "He who endures to the end shall be saved." Near the end of his life, Paul could look back upon his service to Christ and say, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith," according to 2 Timothy 4:7. The Christian life is not always easy. There are burdens, disappointments, temptations, heartaches, tears, sickness, and loss, and unless Christ returns first, there is death, as Hebrews 9:27 reminds us. Scripture never promises Christians a life free from suffering. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation." Paul said in Acts 14:22, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God," and Peter warned Christians in 1 Peter 4:12 not to think that fiery trials were something strange. Christianity gives us something greater than a promise that life will always be easy. It gives us hope beyond this life, strength for the journey, meaning to our suffering, and a destination worth every struggle along the way. Paul said in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." That is the great biblical truth expressed in the hymn: "After this life with all its strife, Heaven will surely be worth it all."

Heaven will be worth all the burdens we bear. The hymn acknowledges the reality of those burdens in the words, "Often I'm hindered on my way, Burdened so heavy I almost fall." God's people sometimes become burdened, and Scripture does not pretend that faithful people never struggle. David knew discouragement, as Psalm 42:5 demonstrates. Elijah became discouraged and exhausted according to 1 Kings 19:4-8. Paul described himself in 2 Corinthians 4:8 as being "hard-pressed on every side." Even faithful Christians can become weary. Faith does not make us immune to physical weakness, emotional pain, discouragement, or exhaustion. There may be times when the burden seems so heavy that we feel as though we can hardly take another step, but experiencing such burdens does not mean that our faith has failed or that God has abandoned us.

Some burdens come simply because we live in a fallen world. There is physical suffering, such as Paul experienced and discussed in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. There can be financial difficulty, and Paul knew what it meant to live in difficult circumstances according to Philippians 4:12. There is grief and death, and John 11:33-35 reminds us

that even Jesus stood in the presence of human grief and wept. There is disappointment. There is loneliness. There is aging and physical decline, and 2 Corinthians 4:16 speaks of the outward man perishing. These realities touch faithful people just as surely as they touch others. Becoming a Christian does not stop the body from aging, prevent every disappointment, remove every financial difficulty, eliminate loneliness, or keep death from entering our families. We continue to live in a world where suffering is real, and some of the burdens we carry are simply part of living in that world.

Other burdens come specifically because we follow Christ. Jesus warned in Luke 14:27-33 that discipleship carries a cost. Second Timothy 3:12 declares, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Moses chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God" rather than enjoy "the passing pleasures of sin," according to Hebrews 11:24-25. The early Christians endured persecution because of their faith, as Hebrews 10:32-34 records. There are times when faithfulness itself brings hardship. Following Christ may cost popularity, relationships, opportunities, comfort, or acceptance. Yet the temporary cost of discipleship must always be measured against the eternal value of what Christ has promised. Moses made that choice, the early Christians made that choice, and faithful Christians must continue making that choice.

God invites us to bring our burdens to Him. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." Paul teaches us in Philippians 4:6-7 to bring our concerns to God in prayer. We are not expected to pretend that burdens do not exist. We are invited to bring them to the One who cares for us. God also gives us one another to help carry burdens. Galatians 6:2 commands, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Christians are not supposed to make the journey toward Heaven alone. Hebrews 3:13 teaches us to encourage one another, 1 Thessalonians 4:18 teaches us to comfort one another, and James 5:16 teaches us to pray for one another. God has provided prayer, His promises, and the fellowship of His people to help sustain us along the journey.

Our burdens are temporary. Paul described affliction in 2 Corinthians 4:17 as "light" and "for a moment" when compared with eternity. That does not mean suffering feels insignificant while we experience it. Paul himself experienced tremendous suffering, as 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 makes abundantly clear. His point is comparison. Put present suffering on one side and eternal glory on the other, and there is no comparison. A burden may feel crushing while we carry it, but even a lifetime of earthly suffering is temporary when placed beside eternity. Romans 8:18 makes exactly that

comparison between “the sufferings of this present time” and “the glory which shall be revealed in us.” The burden may be heavy now, but we are carrying it toward a place where burdens will be no more.

Heaven will also be worth all the trials, toils, and tears. The hymn says, “Many the trials, toils and tears, Many a heartache may here appall.” Trials are part of the Christian journey. James said in James 1:2, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” James 1:3 explains that trials test our faith and that the testing of faith produces patience or endurance, while James 1:4 shows that endurance helps bring us toward spiritual maturity. Trials are painful, but they need not be pointless. God can use the difficulties through which we pass to strengthen qualities within us that ease and comfort alone would never produce.

Trials can strengthen rather than destroy us. Peter compared tested faith to gold refined by fire in 1 Peter 1:6-7. Faith tested by adversity can become stronger. Paul learned through his weakness to depend upon God’s strength according to 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Difficulty can teach us dependence upon God, patience, prayer, compassion, perseverance, and the temporary nature of this world. Trials reveal where our confidence truly rests. They can strip away the illusion that we are self-sufficient and remind us how desperately we need God. They can make us more compassionate toward others who suffer because we have learned what it means to hurt ourselves. They can teach us to persevere when immediate relief does not come, and they can remind us that this present world was never intended to be our final home.

Christians will experience tears. Christianity does not teach us that faithful people never cry. Jesus Himself wept according to John 11:35. Paul served the Lord “with many tears,” according to Acts 20:19. Christians grieve, although 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says that we do not grieve “as others who have no hope.” Faith does not remove every tear. Faith gives us hope through our tears. The difference between Christian grief and hopeless grief is not that the Christian never feels sorrow. The difference is that sorrow is not the end of the Christian’s story. We can cry while believing. We can grieve while hoping. We can hurt while still trusting the promises of God.

The trials of this life teach us not to make this world our home. Abraham looked for “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” according to Hebrews 11:10. God’s faithful people confessed that they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” according to Hebrews 11:13. Philippians 3:20 declares, “Our citizenship is in heaven,” while Hebrews 13:14 says, “Here we have no continuing city, but we seek

the one to come." The difficulties of this life remind us that everything here is temporary. We should never become so attached to this world that we forget the world to come. Our earthly homes, possessions, circumstances, and bodies are temporary. We are traveling toward something eternal.

One day every tear of the faithful will be gone. Revelation 21:4 gives one of Scripture's most beautiful promises: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." It continues, "There shall be no more death," "nor sorrow," "nor crying," and "there shall be no more pain," because "the former things have passed away." Think about everything contained in those words. No funeral homes. No gravesides. No final goodbyes. No bodies weakened by age. No painful diagnoses. No broken hearts. No temptation. No sin. No death. Every tear shed in faithfulness to Christ will one day give way to eternal joy. Everything that makes this life painful belongs to the temporary order that will pass away. Heaven will be worth every tear because there the causes of those tears will be gone forever.

Heaven will be worth all the endurance required to get there. The hymn expresses the determination, "Toiling and pain I will endure." The Christian life requires endurance. Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, "He who endures to the end shall be saved." Hebrews 12:1 tells us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us," and Hebrews 12:2 says that we run while "looking unto Jesus." Christianity is not merely about beginning the race. We must finish. A good beginning is important, but a good beginning by itself does not constitute a finished race. The Christian life requires continuing faithfulness through whatever circumstances may arise until our course on earth is complete.

We must not allow hardship to turn us away from Christ. In the parable of the sower, Jesus described some who received the Word with joy but had no root according to Matthew 13:20-21. When tribulation or persecution arose, they stumbled. Jesus calls us to a deeper faith: faith that remains when life hurts, faith that remains when prayers are not answered as quickly as we desire, faith that remains when others turn away, and faith that remains when following Christ becomes costly. It is easy to speak of faithfulness when everything is comfortable. Endurance is demonstrated when remaining faithful becomes difficult. The faith Christ desires is not a shallow faith dependent upon favorable circumstances but a rooted faith that continues to trust and obey Him through hardship.

We must not grow weary in doing good. Galatians 6:9 says, “Let us not grow weary while doing good.” Why? “For in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Paul similarly wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,” and he assures us that our labor in the Lord “is not in vain.” There may be times when faithful service seems unnoticed, when good work seems unappreciated, or when we wonder whether our efforts accomplish anything. God assures us that labor performed faithfully in His service is never wasted. The harvest may not always be visible immediately, but God sees the work, and therefore we must not lose heart.

We must keep our eyes upon what is eternal. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “We do not lose heart.” The outward man may be perishing, yet the inward man can be renewed day by day. Our affliction is working “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” according to 2 Corinthians 4:17. Therefore, Paul explains in verse 18 that we look not merely at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, because “the things which are seen are temporary,” while “the things which are not seen are eternal.” If we look only at what we can presently see, suffering may seem overwhelming. Faith looks beyond the temporary circumstances to the eternal reality God has promised. Our bodies are temporary. Our troubles are temporary. Our possessions are temporary. This world is temporary. The glory toward which God’s faithful people are moving is eternal.

Moses illustrates this eternal perspective. According to Hebrews 11:24-25, he rejected the temporary pleasures of sin and chose identification with God’s people. Hebrews 11:26 says that he valued the reproach associated with God’s purposes above the treasures of Egypt. Why would a man turn away from temporary pleasure, prestige, and treasure and choose hardship with God’s people? The text answers, “For he looked to the reward.” Moses made his decision in light of something greater than the immediate circumstances. Faith looks beyond what sin offers now to what God promises eternally. If we keep our eyes only upon immediate pleasure, immediate comfort, and immediate gain, we may make disastrous spiritual choices. Moses teaches us to look to the reward.

Paul likewise endured because he knew what awaited him. At the end of his life he could say in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.” Then he looked forward and said in verse 8, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.” Whatever faithfulness to Christ costs us, losing our soul costs infinitely more. Jesus asked in Matthew 16:26, “For what profit is it to a

man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" No earthly possession is worth abandoning Christ. No temporary pleasure is worth abandoning Christ. No relationship is worth abandoning Christ. No persecution is worth abandoning Christ. No hardship is worth abandoning Christ. Do not give up on an eternal reward because of a temporary trial.

Heaven will surely be worth it all because of what awaits the faithful. The hymn says, "Jesus has promised and I'm sure, Heaven will surely be worth it all." Our hope rests upon the promise of Jesus. Jesus comforted His disciples in John 14:1 by saying, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." He continued in John 14:2, "In My Father's house are many mansions," and, "I go to prepare a place for you." Then He promised in verse 3, "I will come again and receive you to Myself." Why? "That where I am, there you may be also." Our hope of Heaven is not built upon human imagination. It rests upon the promise of Jesus Christ.

Heaven means being with the Lord. Paul desired "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," according to Philippians 1:23. First Thessalonians 4:17 says that at Christ's return the faithful will "always be with the Lord." Revelation 22:4 says of God's servants, "They shall see His face." The greatest blessing of Heaven is not merely what will be absent. It is Who will be present. We rejoice that there will be no death, sorrow, crying, pain, temptation, or sin, but Heaven's greatest glory is fellowship with God. The Christian's hope is not simply escape from an unpleasant world. It is eternal life in the presence of the Lord.

Heaven is where righteousness dwells. Second Peter 3:13 says that we look for "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Revelation 21:27 declares that nothing that defiles will enter the heavenly city. There will be no sin, no temptation, no corruption, and no wickedness. Everything that presently pollutes human life and separates mankind from God will be absent. There will be no battle between righteousness and wickedness because wickedness will have no place there. The faithful will dwell eternally where righteousness is perfectly at home.

Heaven is where death is defeated forever. First Corinthians 15:26 identifies death as "the last enemy." Christ has secured victory over death through His resurrection, as 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 and verses 54-57 proclaim. Revelation 21:4 says, "There shall be no more death," while Revelation 22:3 says, "There shall be no more curse." Death has touched every generation and entered countless homes, separating people who love one another and bringing grief that words often cannot describe. But death does not have the

final word for those who belong to Christ. Jesus has conquered it, and in the eternal state death will be gone forever.

Heaven is also a place of rest. Hebrews 4:9 declares, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” Revelation 14:13 says that those who die in the Lord “rest from their labors.” The work, struggles, and weariness of earthly service will not last forever. There is work to be done now. There are burdens to carry now. There are battles to fight now. There are souls to reach now. There are temptations to resist now. But the day is coming when faithful servants of Christ will rest from their earthly labors.

Heaven is our eternal inheritance. First Peter 1:4 describes that inheritance as “incorruptible,” “undefiled,” one that “does not fade away,” and “reserved in heaven for you.” Earthly possessions deteriorate. Earthly achievements are eventually forgotten. Earthly bodies grow old. Earth itself will not remain forever, as 2 Peter 3:10-13 teaches. But our heavenly inheritance does not fade away. Everything we possess here can eventually be lost, damaged, destroyed, or left behind. The inheritance God reserves for His faithful people is different. It is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, and eternal.

Heaven will make every faithful sacrifice worthwhile. Paul suffered tremendously for Christ, as 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 records, yet he could still say in Romans 8:18, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Imagine looking back from eternity upon every temptation resisted, every sacrifice made, every tear shed, every prayer prayed, every act of service, and every time you chose Christ when another path seemed easier. There will be no faithful Christian in Heaven saying, “Serving Jesus cost me too much.” When we see what God has prepared for His faithful people, we will know beyond question: Heaven was surely worth it all.

Heaven will be worth all the burdens we bear, so we remember the words of 1 Peter 5:7, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” Heaven will be worth all the trials, toils, and tears, because Revelation 21:4 promises, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Heaven will be worth all the endurance required to get there, so Hebrews 12:1 urges us, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Heaven will be worth it all because of what awaits the faithful, for 1 Thessalonians 4:17 promises, “So shall we always be with the Lord.” The burdens are real, the tears are real, and the endurance required is real, but the promises of God are also real, and the glory awaiting the faithful is beyond comparison.

As this Gospel Meeting comes to its conclusion, the Gospel's invitation is ultimately an invitation to prepare for eternity. We have talked about the Gospel being for all. We have talked about trusting Jesus. We have talked about building Christian homes. We have talked about marching onward as Christian soldiers. Now comes the question: Where are we marching? Hebrews 11:10 speaks of "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Everything we have studied during this meeting ultimately points us toward eternity. The Gospel is for all because all need salvation. We trust Jesus because He alone can save. We build homes around His Word because we want our families prepared for eternity. We march onward because there is a destination ahead of us. We are seeking that city whose builder and maker is God.

But Heaven is promised to those who belong to Christ and remain faithful to Him. We must hear the Gospel according to Romans 10:17. We must believe in Jesus Christ according to John 8:24. We must repent of our sins according to Acts 17:30. We must confess Christ according to Romans 10:9-10. We must be baptized into Christ according to Galatians 3:27 and Acts 2:38. We must then walk faithfully with Him according to Revelation 2:10. Heaven is not merely a comforting idea to discuss at the end of life. It is the eternal destination for which we must prepare now by coming to Christ according to His Gospel and remaining faithful to Him.

And to the Christian who is tired tonight: do not quit. To the Christian carrying a heavy burden: do not quit. To the Christian facing temptation: do not quit. To the Christian grieving someone you love: do not quit. To the Christian wondering whether faithfulness is worth the struggle: do not quit. Look beyond the present struggle. The burden is temporary. The trial is temporary. The tears are temporary. The pain is temporary. This earthly life is temporary. But the glory is eternal. The Christian journey may sometimes be difficult, but difficulty does not change the destination. Do not surrender an eternal reward because the present road has become hard.

Paul settles the matter for us in Romans 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." That is the perspective with which we should leave this Gospel Meeting. Whatever burdens we carry, whatever trials we face, whatever tears we shed, whatever sacrifices faithfulness requires, and whatever endurance the journey demands, none of it can compare with the eternal glory awaiting those who remain faithful to Jesus Christ. So keep believing. Keep obeying. Keep serving. Keep praying. Keep enduring. Keep your eyes upon what is eternal, and do not quit before the race is finished. "After this life with all its strife, Heaven will surely be worth it all."

From the Bible to Heaven

The purpose of the Gospel is not merely to make us better people for a few years upon this earth. It is not merely to give us stronger families, better habits, greater peace of mind, or a religious identity. The Gospel is God's message of salvation, and its direction is ultimately from this present life toward eternity with Him. Everything we have considered leads to that great conclusion. The Gospel is for all because all have sinned and all need the Savior. We must learn to trust Jesus because He alone has the words of eternal life and His blood alone provides the sacrifice for sin. We must build our homes upon the Word of God because our families possess souls that will live beyond this world. We must march onward as faithful Christian soldiers because there is a spiritual battle to fight and a faith to keep. We must endure burdens, trials, toils, and tears because Heaven will surely be worth it all. The Bible does not merely tell us that Heaven exists. It tells us how sinful people can be reconciled to God, how we must live after receiving that salvation, and how we can finally reach the eternal home God has promised to His faithful people.

The journey to Heaven must begin with God's Word. We cannot discover the way to Heaven by human wisdom, personal feelings, family tradition, popular opinion, or religious custom. Proverbs 14:12 warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Jeremiah 10:23 reminds us that "the way of man is not in himself." If Heaven is God's home, then God has the right to tell us how to get there. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." That statement removes every possibility of reaching God independently of Jesus Christ. We do not need to invent a road to Heaven because God has already revealed the way. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." If we want to know where we are going, we must allow God's Word to illuminate the path before us. From the Bible to Heaven means beginning with what God has spoken and continuing in that Word until faith becomes sight.

The Bible first confronts us with the reason we need salvation. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin is not merely an unfortunate mistake or an undesirable habit. First John 3:4 identifies sin as lawlessness, and Isaiah 59:1-2 teaches that sin separates us from God. Romans 6:23 declares, "For the wages of sin is death." We cannot understand the importance of salvation until we understand the seriousness of sin. We cannot appreciate the cross until we understand why Christ had to die. We cannot appreciate Heaven until we understand what would keep us from it.

Every accountable person must face the reality that he has sinned against God and cannot erase that sin by his own goodness. Good deeds performed today cannot undo sins committed yesterday. Human morality cannot provide atonement. Religious sincerity cannot wash away guilt. We need something we could never provide for ourselves, and that is exactly what God has provided through His Son.

God did not leave sinful humanity without hope. John 3:16 declares that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Jesus came to give His life as a ransom according to Matthew 20:28. First Peter 2:24 says that He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Ephesians 1:7 declares, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." First John 1:7 says that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Jesus died, He was buried, and He rose again. The empty tomb declares that death did not defeat Him. The Gospel therefore does not point us toward ourselves as our own saviors. It points us toward Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves, but we can trust and obey the Savior who died for us. We cannot provide the cleansing blood, but we can come to the One whose blood cleanses from sin. We cannot conquer death ourselves, but we can belong to the One who has already conquered it.

Because the Gospel is for all, the invitation is for you. It does not matter whether a person is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, young or old, respected or forgotten by the world. God "shows no partiality," according to Acts 10:34. Jesus commanded that the Gospel be preached "to every creature" in Mark 16:15. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," according to 1 Timothy 2:4. Second Peter 3:9 says that He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." No one should look at his past and conclude that the Gospel could never be for him. No one should look at his sins and decide that he is beyond the reach of Christ. The same Gospel that exposes our sin also announces the Savior. The question is not whether God has provided a way. The question is whether we will trust Him enough to follow the way He has revealed.

That saving response begins by hearing the Gospel, because Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We must believe in Jesus Christ, for Jesus warned in John 8:24, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." But biblical faith does not stop with mental agreement. The faith that saves is a faith willing to obey the One in whom it trusts. Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Hebrews 5:9 describes Christ as "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." If Jesus is truly

Lord, then our response cannot be to hear His commands and then substitute our own plan. Trust says, “Jesus has spoken, and I will take Him at His Word.”

Jesus commands repentance. In Luke 13:3 He warned, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Acts 17:30 says that God “commands all men everywhere to repent.” Repentance is more than feeling sorry that sin has produced unpleasant consequences. It is a change of mind concerning sin that results in a changed direction of life. The person traveling toward Heaven cannot deliberately cling to the very sins from which Christ came to save him. The Gospel calls us away from rebellion and toward submission to God. Repentance says that sin will no longer be our master and that Christ will now be our Lord. This does not mean that Christians become incapable of ever sinning again, but it does mean that we can no longer make peace with sin as the chosen direction of our lives.

We must also confess Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9-10 connects confession with salvation, and Acts 8 records the Ethiopian’s desire to obey the Gospel after hearing Jesus preached. Christianity is not a secret allegiance. We acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and submit ourselves to His authority. But the New Testament does not stop with hearing, believing, repenting, and confessing. Jesus said in Mark 16:16, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” When convicted hearers asked the apostles in Acts 2:37, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter answered in Acts 2:38, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Saul was told in Acts 22:16, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Galatians 3:27 says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” We should trust Jesus enough to receive His salvation in the way He has revealed.

Baptism is not an attempt to earn salvation by human merit, nor is there any saving power inherent in the water itself. Salvation is possible because Jesus shed His blood, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. Romans 6:3-4 teaches that those baptized into Christ are baptized into His death, buried with Him through baptism, and raised to “walk in newness of life.” First Peter 3:21 says, “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism,” while explaining that this is not the removal of physical dirt but an appeal to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The power is God’s, the blood is Christ’s, the resurrection is Christ’s, and salvation is by God’s grace. Faith simply trusts God enough to obey what He has commanded. The people on Pentecost did so. The Ethiopian did so. Saul did so. The Philippian jailer did so. The question for us is whether we will do the same.

Coming to Christ, however, is the beginning of the Christian life rather than its conclusion. Jesus did not call us merely to experience one moment of obedience and then return to living for ourselves. He said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Romans 6:4 says that those raised with Christ are to "walk in newness of life." Revelation 2:10 calls us to be "faithful until death." The road to Heaven is a life of continuing faith, repentance, worship, obedience, service, growth, and perseverance. We begin by faith, and we continue by faith. We begin by submitting to Christ, and we continue submitting to Christ. We begin by turning from sin, and we continue fighting against sin. The One whom we obey at the beginning is the One whom we must faithfully follow all the way to the end.

This means that God's Word must continue to govern us after we become Christians. James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only." We must allow Scripture to shape our beliefs, our worship, our morality, our marriages, our homes, our speech, our attitudes, our priorities, and our treatment of other people. Christianity cannot be confined to a few hours inside a church building. Christ must be Lord of the entire life. In our homes we should be able to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Fathers must lead faithfully, mothers must exercise godly influence, children must be taught the truth, husbands and wives must honor God's design, and every member of the family must understand that earthly success means very little if the soul is lost. Matthew 6:33 gives the priority that should govern us: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

We must also understand that the journey toward Heaven involves spiritual warfare. Satan does not want us to reach our destination. First Peter 5:8 warns that "your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Ephesians 6:11 therefore commands us to "put on the whole armor of God." We need truth, righteousness, preparation with the Gospel, faith, the hope of salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We must resist temptation rather than surrender to it, reject error rather than compromise with it, pursue righteousness rather than imitate the world, and remain watchful rather than become spiritually careless. First Timothy 6:12 commands, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." The Christian cannot afford to forget what is at stake.

We do not make this journey alone. Christ has given us His church, His body, in which Christians worship, serve, grow, encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, and help one another remain faithful. Ephesians 4:4 declares that there is "one

body," and Colossians 1:18 identifies Christ as "the head of the body, the church." Hebrews 10:24-25 teaches Christians to consider one another in order to stir up love and good works and not to forsake assembling together. Galatians 6:2 commands, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Hebrews 3:13 tells Christians to encourage one another. God did not design Christianity as an isolated journey in which every believer attempts to reach Heaven entirely alone. We need one another. When one is weak, another can encourage. When one is burdened, another can help carry the burden. When one is grieving, another can comfort. When one is struggling, another can pray.

There will be times when the journey is difficult. Faithfulness does not guarantee freedom from pain. There may be sickness, disappointment, loneliness, grief, temptation, persecution, financial difficulty, family heartache, physical decline, and death. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation." Yet difficulty does not mean that God has failed. Romans 8:18 gives us the perspective we need: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Second Corinthians 4:17 describes present affliction as temporary when compared with the "eternal weight of glory" awaiting God's people. We do not minimize suffering. We compare it with eternity. Put every tear, burden, heartache, disappointment, and sacrifice on one side and eternal glory on the other, and there is no comparison.

Therefore, when you become tired, do not quit. When you carry a burden that seems almost too heavy to bear, do not quit. When temptation returns again and again, do not quit. When others abandon the truth, do not quit. When faithfulness becomes unpopular, do not quit. When you pray and the answer does not come as quickly as you hoped, do not quit. When you stand beside the grave of someone you love, do not quit. When age weakens the body and abilities once taken for granted begin to disappear, do not quit. Hebrews 12:1 tells us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us," and verse 2 tells us how: by "looking unto Jesus." Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." The Christian race is not won by those who merely start. We must finish faithfully.

Keep your eyes upon what is ahead. Jesus said in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." He continued, "In My Father's house are many mansions," and promised, "I go to prepare a place for you." Then He said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Heaven means being with the Lord. First Thessalonians 4:17 says, "And thus we shall

always be with the Lord." Revelation 21:4 promises that God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes," and that "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying," and "there shall be no more pain." Revelation 22:4 says of God's servants, "They shall see His face." Heaven is not merely precious because of everything that will be absent. It is precious because of the One who will be present.

Think about what that means. No more death. No more funeral homes. No more gravesides. No more final goodbyes. No more bodies weakened by age. No more painful diagnoses. No more temptation. No more sin. No more broken hearts. No more tears of grief. No more separation from those who have died faithfully in the Lord. Revelation 14:13 says that those who die in the Lord "rest from their labors." First Peter 1:4 describes the Christian's inheritance as "incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Everything we possess here eventually deteriorates. Bodies grow old. Possessions wear out. Achievements are forgotten. Generations come and go. But the inheritance God promises His faithful people does not fade away.

The great tragedy would be to know all of this and still lose our soul. Jesus asked in Matthew 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" Suppose a person gained everything this world considers valuable. Suppose he possessed wealth, influence, success, comfort, recognition, and every pleasure he desired. If he reached the end of life unprepared to meet God, what would any of it matter? Conversely, suppose faithfulness to Christ costs us something. Suppose we must surrender a sinful pleasure, lose the approval of others, sacrifice something we value, endure ridicule, resist temptation, or bear hardship. What temporary sacrifice could possibly compare with eternal life? No possession is worth losing your soul. No pleasure is worth losing your soul. No relationship is worth losing your soul. No popularity is worth losing your soul. No amount of worldly success is worth losing your soul.

There is also urgency in this decision because none of us possesses a promise of tomorrow. James 4:14 describes life as "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." Second Corinthians 6:2 says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." We should never allow the devil to convince us that obedience can safely be postponed. A person can believe the truth and still be lost if he continually refuses to act upon it. Knowing the road does not help the traveler who refuses to walk it. Knowing what Jesus commands does not replace obeying what Jesus commands. If you know that you need to obey the Gospel, there is no spiritual advantage

in waiting. If you are a Christian who has wandered away, there is no advantage in remaining away. Eternity is too important to gamble upon another day.

So what must we do if we want to go from the Bible to Heaven? We must hear the Gospel. We must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We must repent of our sins. We must confess Christ. We must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, trusting the saving work of Jesus rather than ourselves. Then we must rise to walk in newness of life and remain faithful to Him. We must love His Word, worship according to His will, resist sin, serve others, build our homes upon Scripture, work within His body, proclaim the Gospel, bear our burdens faithfully, encourage our brethren, endure our trials, and keep looking toward the eternal reward. None of this means that we earn Heaven. Salvation is possible because of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ. But the grace that saves us calls us to trust the Savior enough to obey Him and follow Him faithfully.

Perhaps the most important question is not whether we believe in Heaven. The question is whether we are prepared to go there. It is possible to sing about Heaven, preach about Heaven, talk about Heaven, attend funerals where Heaven is discussed, and still fail to prepare for Heaven. Jesus warned in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” Mere religious profession is not enough. We must take Jesus at His Word. If He tells us how to be saved, we must obey Him. If He tells us how to worship, we must follow Him. If He tells us how to live, we must submit to Him. If He calls us to endure, we must remain faithful. The road to Heaven is not traveled by simply saying that Jesus is Lord, but by living under His lordship.

At the end of life, many things that seem important now will suddenly appear very small. Titles will not matter. Bank accounts will not matter. Houses will not matter. Possessions will not matter. Popularity will not matter. The praise or criticism of the world will not matter. What will matter is whether we belonged to Jesus Christ and remained faithful to Him. Paul knew that moment was approaching when he wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Because he had finished faithfully, he could then say, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.” That is how the Christian should desire to finish. Not merely having started well. Not merely having once believed. Not merely having once obeyed. But having kept the faith.

From the Bible to Heaven is therefore more than the theme of a Gospel Meeting. It describes the journey of faith. We begin with the Bible because faith comes by hearing the Word of God. We come to Christ because there is salvation in no other. We obey His Gospel because we trust Him to save us according to His promise. We rise to walk in newness of life because He has called us out of sin. We build our homes upon His Word because our families are traveling toward eternity. We march onward because there is a spiritual battle to fight. We endure because the suffering of this present time cannot compare with the glory to come. We keep looking toward Heaven because we know that this world is not our permanent home.

If you have never obeyed the Gospel, come to Christ according to His Word to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, take Him at His Word. If you once obeyed the Gospel but have wandered away, return to Him. If you are faithful but weary, keep going. If you are burdened, cast your care upon Him. If you are tempted, resist the devil and remain steadfast in the faith. If you are grieving, remember that Christians do not sorrow as those who have no hope. If you are approaching the end of life, keep looking unto Jesus. Whatever your situation may be, do not allow anything temporary to rob you of what is eternal.

One day the Bible we now read by faith will have guided us through our final earthly day. One day the last temptation will have been resisted, the last prayer offered, the last burden carried, the last tear shed, the last act of service completed, and the last step of the race taken. Then the question will not be whether this life was always easy. The question will be whether we were faithful. May we so hear, believe, obey, serve, endure, and finish that when our earthly journey is over, we may receive the eternal inheritance God has promised His faithful people. Until that day, let the Word of God remain the lamp to our feet, let Jesus Christ remain the Lord whom we follow, let Heaven remain the home toward which we travel, and let this be the purpose of our lives: **from the Bible to Heaven.**

If you are reading this and desire to follow the New Testament pattern of Christianity, we encourage you to find a faithful church of Christ near you, where the Bible is respected as the final authority, the Gospel plan of salvation is faithfully taught, worship is offered according to the teaching of the New Testament, and Christians are seeking to live and serve as the church Christ established. Do not simply look for the nearest congregation or assume that every congregation bearing the name is necessarily faithful; compare what is taught and practiced with the Scriptures, just as the Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Ask questions, open your Bible, examine the teaching carefully, and seek Christians who are committed to speaking where the Bible speaks and following the pattern revealed in God's Word. A faithful congregation can help you learn the Gospel, obey Jesus Christ, grow in your faith, worship with other Christians, serve the Lord, and encourage you as you continue your journey toward eternity. Find a faithful church of Christ near you, take your Bible with you, and never stop measuring everything you hear by the Word of God as you travel **from the Bible to Heaven.**

The Plan of Salvation

FROM SIN TO HEAVEN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

1. HEAR

Hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
Romans 10:17

2. BELIEVE

Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

"If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."
John 8:24

3. REPENT

Repent of your sins — change your mind about sin and turn to God.

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained."
Acts 17:30-31

4. CONFESS

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ before others.

"Therefore I exhort you to confess the good confession before many witnesses."
1 Timothy 6:12

5. BE BAPTIZED

Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Acts 2:38

6. LIVE FAITHFULLY

Continue to live faithfully and remain steadfast in the faith.

"... if indeed you continue in the faith, steadfast and immovable, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven ..."
Colossians 1:23



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