

# Assurance of Salvation

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[ 0 : 00 ] Put your thinking caps on. It hasn't been hard in the sense that I'm wrestling with new concepts. And I expect it will help you solve a problem that pops up in a number of places in the New Testament.

And so your attention will help us achieve that goal of giving you a much firmer grip on what you have in Christ. So in keeping with that, we're going to go back to our acronym.

Didn't get a chance to put the slide in, so you're going to have to picture it in your mind. We're becoming faster learners. Remember, that's an acronym. We want to forget what we think we knew and take a fresh perspective on the passage.

That's going to be really important this morning. We want to be active. Oh, look. Good job, Libby. We want to act. We want to be active learners.

Take notes. Really interact with what you're hearing. Maybe if you think of a verse that relates that I don't bring up in the sermon, write that down. Write down questions, but be active in your learning and take action.

[ 1 : 34 ] So that's our A. Our S is to be aware of our state. Are you coming? Open Bible, open mind, ready to learn.

Eager to hear what God has for you. Because the fact of the matter is, God has something for you this morning. Isaiah said that when the Bible is opened, it always bears fruit.

Always. So God has something for you today. Are you in a state that you're ready to receive? To hear what God has to say. And then the last one, the one that we're focusing on today, is this is part of action, is teach somebody.

Or talk to someone about what you've learned this morning. Teaching is particularly important. One of the things I've learned over the course of my life is that the clearest demonstration of mastery of anything is the ability to teach it to somebody else.

If I can teach it and they get it, that tells me I've learned it. When I have been in different seasons of my life, been training other people, one of the ways that I close the loop and I assess whether that person is ready to be set free to start walking their own, is can they teach what we've talked about themselves?

[ 2 : 48 ] They've been taking it in, but now have they owned it and now they can deliver it. So I want you to put in your mind to think of something you can talk to and teach what you learned today.

Even if it's somebody who sat in this auditorium today. You say, well, they heard the same message I did. Actually, I'll bet you 50 bucks they didn't.

How can I say that? Because studies show, I'm going to challenge you to beat this, studies show that you retain 10% of what you hear in this format. That's it, 10%.

Which means if you hear 10% and someone else hears a different 10%, you've heard totally different messages. So compare notes and get the whole, get the full message together.

Does that make sense? So teach somebody else. We want to be faster learners. So we're absorbing God's word. Now let's turn to Colossians. We're going to talk about facing hard questions because that's what we're going to do this morning.

[ 3 : 52 ] There is a challenge with the interpretation of Colossians 1.23. We're going to leave that hanging out there. I'm not going to tell you what it is yet. You'll know in a minute. There's people who will say, you know what?

I don't trust the Bible. I don't believe it. There's so many different interpretations. There's so many different ways you can apply it. There's so many. Everybody's got a different meaning. I just can't trust a book that's that broad.

You know what my response is to people who say that? Gently and lovingly. You've never read it yet, have you? You've never read the Bible.

Well, what do you mean? Well, your statement that the Bible has a whole breadth of interpretations and every person has a different understanding of what the message of the Bible is.

That statement tells me you've never read it. Well, that's kind of rude. I'll tell you why I can say that. The Bible actually has a very clear, unified message.

[ 4 : 55 ] From Genesis 1-1 all the way to the end of Revelation 22, it's a consistent message. It's a message to each one of us.

If I was to put the message of the Bible in a sentence, it would be this. It's God's, listen to these words. It's God's relentless pursuit. Relentless.

It's God's relentless pursuit to rescue and restore a broken humanity, broken men and women, into a loving relationship with himself.

That's the unifying message of the Bible. All the way through. And how does that break down? We see a God who is a God of love, who is good.

We see that from the opening verses of the Bible. God created these good things. Light and darkness. Sun and moon. The stars. Plant life.

[ 5 : 56 ] It's all engineered. It works together so well. Our existence, our very existence is a miracle. Because a good God made us. And then he created man in his own image, who he loved.

The only part of creation, he said, was very good. And then what happened? Our first ancestors rejected his command and disobeyed. And as a consequence, we inherited their sin.

But in the midst, in Genesis chapter 3, in the midst of meeting out their punishment, God's conversation to Adam and Eve, there's a kernel of hope in the middle of that really stern rebuke.

And God laying out the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience. In the middle of it is a promise of a one who will come, who will be wounded by the serpent, Satan, but will ultimately stomp him on the head and triumph.

It's the first picture we see in the Bible of Jesus. Of a Savior who is coming to fix the problem that happened in the garden.

[ 7 : 09 ] And then as you read through the Old Testament, again and again and again, you see these pictures. That's the message of the Bible. We need to read it. We need to listen. We need to study it to parse out what that means.

But I promise you, brothers and sisters, this is not a book that has a confusing, conflicting body of messages that different people have different perspectives on, and then we're open to whatever interpretation we want to bring to it.

That's simply not true. We can know this book, and in knowing it, we will know God. And knowing God will be set free. That's the message of the Bible.

But sometimes there are passages that are really hard to understand, that do seem to be contradictory. I'm not going to hide from that. There are some pastors, church traditions, where the message is, if you doubt, you're wrong.

If you doubt, you're sinful. If you doubt, you're inadequate. And certainly, if you doubt, don't bring me your questions. That's kind of my job.

[ 8 : 26 ] That's our job with each other. You're going to see it as we get to the end of this message, that doubt is actually very helpful and important. But what do we do with it? There's three ways that we respond to these things that raise questions or appear to be contradictory, or just raise questions in our mind.

And the first one is to just throw up our hands and feet and go, oh yeah, that guy was right. The Bible is open to various interpretations, and I can't figure it out. And I got way more urgent problems than trying to figure this stuff out, so I'm just going to put it back on the shelf and just muddle my way through.

That's the path to deconstruction that we've talked about in the weeks past. That decision to say, I am going to figure out my own way in my own time. I am God.

That's a path of despair. It's hopeless. The other one, and this is a good one, is to dig in and study. To say, maybe there's something I don't understand here.

Maybe there's something I need to get a better grasp on. And so we dig in, we start looking at different resources. Maybe you talk to somebody like one of the pastors, or somebody you know who's been walking with the Lord longer, who can teach you how to study the Bible, and you dig in.

[ 9 : 39 ] The Bible's rich. I was telling somebody recently, I love to read. You guys know this. But most of the books on my shelf, it's one and done. I've read that book.

I've gotten out what I need. And when I read it again, it's like, okay, yawn. Already got that. I've been reading the Bible for almost 45 years. And all I discover is that there's more. There's more there. So dig in and study. Don't be surprised if you don't get it. You heard me say over and over and over again in our study in Mark. Doggone, I have read Mark 50 times, and I just discovered something I missed.

Do not be surprised if you have that experience. Also recognize there are going to be places that you just don't understand it.

Because what the Bible is trying to convey are things that are beyond our understanding to a great extent. And God knows that.

[ 10 : 42 ] Remember what we talked about in Hebrews 1, verses 1 to 3? God first spoke to us in many times through the scripture. God's story. And he realized, we're kind of thick-headed and we're not getting it.

And so what do you do? He sent his son. So we could look at Jesus and see the exact representation of his nature. And even then, we don't get it.

The disciples were walking with him and they didn't get it. So don't be surprised. Don't give up. But sometimes you have to recognize, this is above my pay grade.

I just don't get it. I don't know how this could work. If you think about all the variables that God has to juggle, all the things that, all the ways that your life affects my life, which affects the next person's life, and God sorts that all out, you could watch my brain start to overheat and sparks start to fly. The next step is it just melts down and sludge pours out of my ears. There's some things we just can't understand. And we have to accept that. But in the acceptance, we have to remember that God is good.

[ 12 : 03 ] That God loves you. That God does have a plan. And that plan is for your good and for the good of humanity.

He is a faithful God. We can trust him. And that's, you need to put your doubt in that place. God is good.

God loves you. This doesn't make sense. How do you allow evil? How do you allow pain? Why do you let godly people suffer pain in particular?

You have to decide, God, I will trust you. And then continue to search and continue to look.

Because I promise you, what you'll find is that trust is never misplaced.

What you will discover as you walk with God, that he is good. He does love you. He does have a plan. And we can trust that what we don't understand, it's okay.

[ 13 : 06 ] Because what we don't understand is in good hands. And truth of the matter is, what we think we understand, you're probably wrong. Or you've only got a sliver, a little piece of what it is.

Colossians 1.23 is one of those passages that you read and go, wait, what? So let's turn there and look. We're going to read from verse 19 down to 23.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Jesus. Do not lose sight that this is all God's good pleasure.

He loves you. He delights in giving good gifts. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Jesus and through Jesus to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross.

Through him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven, and although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet he has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death.

[ 14 : 15 ] In order to present you before him, you've got to understand how unbelievably good this is and how much we don't deserve this.

in order for Jesus to present you to his Father, holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

How can that even be? Talk about wonder, a concept that's beyond our pay grade. How can that even be? We're in Romans 5.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Paul loves that concept. You see it repeated in Ephesians 2.

While we were dead in trespasses and sins, that's when God intervened. We hold that truth. We love it. It gives us life.

[15:18] But then we get to chapter 1, verse 23. In order to present you before him, holy and blameless and beyond reproach, if indeed...

Wait, what? If indeed you continue in the faith, firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Wait, what? What? If? I hang on. But I was God's enemy.

I'm dead in trespasses and sins. So how does Paul put this conditional statement? Let's pray about it. We'll start to unpack it.

God, we have to always start with you and with your goodness. That you are a good God.

[16:21] In every sense of that rich word. You are morally good. You are good in that you are appropriate. You are perfect for every situation we face.

You are good in the intentions that you have toward us. In all things, you display your goodness. Even things that we don't understand.

And Lord, we're facing something that we don't understand today. So I pray that your spirit would teach us. Help the words that I speak be clear. Let the hearts and minds of those listening receive what's being said.

And I pray that as we wrap up this morning, that we will be wrapping up with every person here feeling a heart of worship and gratitude for all the good things you do for us.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, if indeed you continue in the faith, that's tough.

[17:25] Let's do a quick review. Leave this slide up for me. Let's do a quick review. God's mission for Jesus was to rescue and restore us to loving relationship with him through Jesus.

That was Jesus' ultimate mission. In Mark, we talked about some sub-missions, but that was the main one. It was our redemption, our reconciliation to God. We can never forget, never forget, that our salvation is according to God's good pleasure.

It was God's good pleasure to put the fullness of deity in that brand new baby that was in the manger in Bethlehem.

It was God's good pleasure for Jesus to go through the trials of growing up. It was God's good pleasure for him to die on the cross for you. Never forget that. Our God is not a miser.

He is so generous that the proper response is to feel just overwhelmed by how good and kind he is. The second thing we need to remember is he is constantly inviting you deeper into relationship with himself.

[18:34] Remember Jesus' prayer in John 17. He's talking to his father. This is eternal life, that they may know you, know you intimately, not just facts, that they may know you, father, and your son who you have sent.

God is inviting you into a deeper relationship with him. And all of this is received by faith. We're trusting that it's true. We're trusting that what God says is true.

And we're acting on it. And what do we receive? We receive reconciliation to God. We receive peace with God. We receive peace with others. We receive the fullness of what the Jews called shalom in our lives.

Wholeness. Peace. Even in the middle of storms, Jesus is a great picture of peace. They're in this horrible storm. And what's Jesus doing?

He's asleep in the back of the boat. That's peace. That's what he has for us. We gain it by faith in what Christ has done for us. And ultimately, we are going to be presented to the Father by a proud older brother, Jesus Christ.

[19:53] It says he's our brother in Romans 8. By a proud older brother. Dad, look at these guys. Look at these girls. They're holy.

They're blameless. They're beyond reproach. We accept that and receive it by faith. But how do we deal with this first verse, first couple words of verse 23?

if, if, how do we get there? Well, I'll tell you, the answer is actually a lot simpler than you think. It's a problem in English as opposed to Greek. If you spoke Greek, if you read this in the original language, if you were having a conversation, if Paul was talking to you instead of writing down Colossians chapter one, you would not think that was a conditional statement at all. It's not conditional. It's not an, if you do this, you will get that.

Because the term, I'm not going to try to pronounce it in Greek, means if indeed, which is why it's translated here, or since indeed, or provided that.

Give me the next slide. I pulled this off a really great tool, the Bible Hub online, BibleHub.com. The word, that's Greek right there, if indeed appears in the New Testament to introduce a statement, listen to this, that is assumed to be true for the sake of argument, or to emphasize the certainty of a condition. It is used to strengthen the connection between the condition and the result. Well, this, Paul starts with the result. We're reconciled to God. We have peace. We're going to be presented by God. That's the result. The condition is our endurance.

[ 21 : 50 ] Yes. But it's because we endure. Now, this is where I knew I was going to struggle. John and Tim and I had lunch this week, and I always try to talk to them about what I'm studying, things I'm having trouble with, make sure that we're on the same page. And we had a great conversation, really enjoyed actually the conversations back and forth. But the conclusion was, John and Tim left our lunch kind of chuckling about and saying to each other, I'm glad he's got to preach this sermon, because this is hard to get across. The idea is that our endurance is one of the things that we get in Christ.

Endurance is not something that we have to do. We have to hold on. We've got to grab a hold and not let go, because we'd be in serious trouble if that was the case. No, it's God holding on to us. Our endurance, the fact that I've been a Christian for 40 plus years, isn't proof of my unbelievable ability to hang on. It's proof that God is a loving God and he is held on to me.

This is actually one of the tests of the reality of your faith, your trust in God, that he is doing this work in you. This is the fruit of our relationship, God, not the root of it. You've got to get this. What you're being told here in Colossians 1.23 is because you will continue in the faith. This is similar to the way that Paul talks in Ephesians and in Romans. He talks about things that are yet future in the past tense. You have been glorified. Well, no, I haven't. I'm still blind as a bat. I got the psoriasis thing going on that doesn't resolve itself. You all can testify to something in your life that doesn't work right yet. So I'm not glorified yet and I'm certainly still dealing with sin. And yet Paul says, you have been glorified. Why? Because it's absolutely certain.

[ 24 : 07 ] If you're in Christ, you will be glorified. John wrote in his first epistle, we don't know what we'll be like, but we do know this, that when he appears, we will be like him. It's certain now. Your endurance in Christ is certain because of God's work in you. Since indeed, you will continue in the faith, firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.

God is holding on to you. Now, if you're like me, there are seasons of your life where you deal with sin. You fail and you may continually fail. Praise God. It's not up to me.

Praise God. It's not up to you. It's up to God doing his work in our lives. That's what we want to focus on here. That's how we untie this conundrum. You're going to come up against things like this in scripture all the time.

It's important that you take a deep breath and study and learn and discover. There's nuance here that I didn't understand. So this is our hope. Our hope is that God is at work in us according to his good pleasure. We read that last week in Philippians chapter two.

So let's talk about God's work. Because I want to give you a quick overview of where God is working in your life to reinforce the fact that he's also working to help you endure. So go ahead and give me the next slide. You know this verse. For by grace, you've been saved through faith and that not of yourselves is a gift of God. The gift of God is your faith. That's not something you drum up. It's a gift that God has given you. The ability to turn to him, to accept him is a gift from God. For by grace, you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It's a gift of God, not of works.

[ 26 : 37 ] When you first look at Colossians 1.23, you go, oh, but that looks an awful lot like a work to me. If indeed you continue. But now recognize it's not a work, brothers and sisters, it's a gift.

Because we're continuing in the faith. It's not as a result of works so that no one may boast. But we are God's workmanship. Again, he's doing the work. We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. So there's an expectation of us, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. So I want to talk just really briefly about what is faith. What is saving faith?

I'm going to start by telling you what it's not. Saving faith is not intellectual assent. I read this week about a controversy that hit the church, the universal church, in the late 1700s, early 1800s, where this guy was telling people, hey, all you need to do is check a few boxes. Tell me that you agree with these certain truth claims and you're in. Welcome to the family.

All you got to do is acknowledge. Are you a sinner? Yep. Did Jesus die for you? Yep. Did he raise? Was he raised from the dead? Yep. Do you believe that was done for you? Yep. Sweet.

Welcome to the family. Oh, that sounds an awful lot like how we approach evangelism in the 21st century, the 20th century. That's not faith. That's just agreement. There's plenty of things that I agree with that have no impact on my life. That's a starting point. Faith involves our mind. So do we need to know those truths? Yes. Do we need to agree to them? Yes. But it doesn't stop there.

[ 28 : 29 ] God's work in us starts with our mind. It starts with the truth. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. It says in John, but it's also a matter of the heart.

What is my heart's response? Some people, the moment they get saved, tell stories of this surge of emotion and joy or of relief or of release, crying, laughing. Other people just, okay, I guess I'm saved now. And it's more low key. But what they discover over time is they're captivated by this man, Jesus. They start to see God everywhere they look. The wonder of God's creation, the beauty of his word captivates their attention. They hear a song about God's redeeming love and they cry. The first time they think, I'm not a crier. Where'd that come from? That's faith. Because faith doesn't involve just your mind. It changes your heart. You see God as he is. And then it's a matter of will. We have to act. And don't forget, this is all God's work in our lives. But we act. We are God's workmanship, his work, created for good works, our work. God has ordained that the way he is going to reach the world is through you guys and me. Go therefore and make disciples, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We're sent. Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. It doesn't say discipline yourself so you can be saved. It says discipline yourself so that you can become like Jesus. That is God's work in you and you participate. So this faith that saves at the beginning, you don't know much.

[ 30 : 33 ] When I got saved as a 14-year-old kid, I knew I'm a sinner. Didn't take a rocket science to figure that out. Even with my high opinion of myself, I know I'm a sinner. I'm a sinner. I need help. I deserve punishment. Jesus took my punishment, died on the cross for my sins. And in accepting that gift, I'm welcomed into relationship with God. That's all I understood. And I didn't understand the nuance.

I didn't understand what that meant for my life. But my heart changed. The next day, I started sharing the gospel with people. Within a month, I didn't tell anybody I'd gotten saved.

Within a month, my mom stopped me and said, what's going on with you? You're different. My will was involved. I was seeking to obey what I was starting to learn in the Bible. Where'd that come from? It's God's work. So that saving faith is an intellectual ascent that changes our heart, that moves us to action. But it's all of God.

Give me the next slide. God continues to work in us. I love this. I've given this verse out probably more than any other. Philippians 1.6 says, for I am confident, confident, sure of this very thing, that he, God, who began a good work in you, will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is at work in you, making you more like Jesus every day. That's why it's an intermission statement. We're striving together to become more like Christ every day. Now, I'm going to say something that's going to trigger some of you. So in anticipation of a very controversial statement, I want you to take a deep breath. It's going to be okay. I'm going to read this verse from the message.

[ 32 : 22 ] I'm not going to get struck by lightning. It's okay. It's actually a very good translation of this verse. There's a little bit of sarcasm there. So there has never been... This is Paul speaking to the Philippian church who he loves.

There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it. Listen to these words and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.

That's what's going on in your life right now. And I am absolutely confident, because I'm confident in God, that he is doing that work in you, he's doing that work in me. Never been the slightest doubt. Isn't that cool?

Even the message can get it right sometimes. So I'm not going to go there. Philippians 2, 12 and 13 says, Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it's God who is at work in you, both to will and to work according to his good pleasure.

God is at work in you. Galatians 5, 22 and 23. You can just race through these slides a little bit because I'm kind of trying to pick up speed to gain some time.

[ 33 : 43 ] Galatians 5, 22 and 23. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It's the fruit of the Spirit. God is at work to produce

these things in us.

At the very beginning in my life, it showed up in me not punching my brother Mike in the head. If you knew Mike, you would understand that was the work of God. If you knew me, you'd say the same thing.

But God is producing this fruit in our lives. God is at work. God is producing this fruit in our lives. God is producing this fruit in our lives. God is producing this fruit in our lives. Our assurance of our salvation is not in our works.

It's not the stuff that we do. Our assurance is in the character and work of God. So when you have doubts, which I think is healthy in a part of spiritual growth, even a necessary part of spiritual growth, there's a place to look in the mirror.

We're going to talk about that in a minute. But you first need to look at God. You need to look at the Lord. Because He's doing the work. The foundation for what we believe is the person and character and work of a loving God who sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, raised Him from the dead, and when He ascended to heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit to live within us and to teach us and to guide us and to shape us.

[ 35 : 12 ] That's the foundation for our hope. That's where we stand. So turn in your Bibles. We're going to spend a moment here. Go to 1 John. It's toward the end of your Bible. This is really interesting about John.

Not me, the apostle. What's interesting about me, if you care, is that the connection I'm about to describe to you, I saw for the first time this week. No, I'm not sure how I missed it.

The apostle John wrote at the end of his gospel, these things I have written to you that you may believe. The gospel of John is an evangelism message.

I've written to you that you may believe. In 1 John, he writes, we're going to look at verses 11 through 13. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his son. He who has the son has the life. He who does not have the son of God, does not have the life. No, this is the connection I just caught this week. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

[ 36 : 35 ] So the gospel is written so that you could believe. The epistle was written, the letter was written to affirm your belief, that you can know that you have eternal life.

There's a whole body of Christians who think you can lose your salvation, who think that we can't really know until we're standing before the throne of God. I'm sorry, that's just not biblical.

It's right there. We can know that we have eternal life. And how do we know? We have the son. We've received what he's given to us. We've received his work on our behalf. We've received the gift of him taking our punishment and giving us his righteousness in return.

If we've done that by faith, we're going to heaven. We have eternal life.

[ 37 : 37 ] And not just are we going to heaven. We have God working in us now. Heaven does not begin the day you die. Heaven begins the day you got saved.

Hell begins the day you were born. And if you don't turn, you live in hell. And then it becomes the ultimate reality of hell. That's the work of God.

It's an important thing to think about. And I don't have time to develop it. So just sit on it and think about it for a while. But we can know that we have eternal life. There's an illustration. We're not going to turn there because of time.

But in John 10, the passage about the good shepherd, Jesus is talking to a group of people. And he's affirming to them that when God saves you, you're saved.

And he tells them that those who respond to my voice, this is you, this yellow candy that Jack gave me. Jesus says, you're in my hand.

[ 38 : 49 ] And you're in the... And you're in the Father's hand. Who's doing the holding? God is.

In this respect, we're passive. We're the recipients of what we've received by faith. When I do this at camps, I grab the...

Because camp is a week of evangelism. A lot of times kids have things stirred up. They're doubting. And sometimes you have to affirm, no, you're okay. If you've trusted Christ, this is how you are.

And I'll tell a young boy or young girl, try to get it out of there. If you can get it out, you can have it.

I've had kids sitting on my shoulders. I've had littler kids trying to pull my arms apart.

They can't do it. Trust me, you can't pull God's hands apart. He's got you. Your salvation is secure. We cannot lose it.

[ 39 : 47 ] The question then, and this is where we're going to bring it home, the question then is not, can I lose my salvation? The proper question is, am I in Christ?

So I mentioned this a few weeks ago. I know I made some of you uncomfortable. I'm not going to apologize because sometimes we need to be made uncomfortable. This is 2 Corinthians 13, verses 5 and 6.

That should be the next slide. Let me test yourselves to see if you're in the face. Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail the test.

For I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. So what is the test? Do I believe God's word? Do I really believe it?

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life. Doubt's normal.

[ 40 : 50 ] We actually should kind of stir it up a little bit. But then we need to look. First step, do I believe this? Yeah, I guess I really do. Am I living it?

Not so much, but I believe it. That's the first step. Second one, this is all out of 1 John. Second one, do I love God's people? John wrote that our love for the brethren, specifically the members of the body of Christ, is proof that we're saved.

Do I love these people? And not just, oh, I like him. I like her. They're kind of nice. But actually, where the rubber meets the road. Do you show them your love?

Kara and Kayla and I felt very loved when a mob of you showed up and helped us move. We feel love and we express love for each other when we pray and when we follow up on things that we've prayed about for each other.

Do you love the brethren? Are you moved to act for other people's benefit, especially at personal cost? It's 1 John 3, 16 and following.

[ 41 : 58 ] Pretty hard passage, by the way, because John is very stern there. But it's proof, that's proof that you're saved. So do you believe God's word? Are you learning to love the brethren?

Now, understand, we tend to think of things as on or off. I hate them or I love them. No, no. Are we growing in our love with the brethren for the people of God?

Second one is, am I striving to keep God's command? Am I aware when I'm not measuring up? Sometimes even to the point of thinking, oh, I don't think I'm a believer because I just can't break this pattern of sin.

I can't figure it out. The very fact that you're asking that question is a pretty good indication that you're in Christ because that's the work of the Holy Spirit convicting you and saying, you need to, let's talk.

Okay, yep, you did it again. Let's talk it over. Let's figure it out. Here's one thing that may happen that happened to me. There was, theologians for centuries have been writing about the besetting sin.

[ 42 : 57 ] All of us have some particular sin that just seems to kick our butt over and over again. And I was talking to God about it. I felt guilty. I would commit the sin and then avoid talking to God for stretches of time because I was so ashamed.

And I was praying about it one day and I was really earnestly praying and God said, John, I just don't care. What? He said, that's not your problem.

We've got other stuff to work on that's even deeper. And he peeled back the hood. So he opened the hood, so to speak, and said, yeah, that sin's a problem. But you see this thing under the hood? We got to fix this. I want you to work on this thing. God is at work in you and part of it is convicting you of sin and moving you to change.

And that desire and that effort, even if it's weak, is an indication that God is at work in your life. So when you examine yourself, do you believe the word?

[ 43 : 56 ] Do you have a growing love for God's people? Do you have a growing awareness of your sin? And do you have the Holy Spirit within you? Well, if you feel the first three, the answer to that is yes.

Have I believed? That's evidence of the Holy Spirit's work. We can't come to Christ apart from him. Do I look to God to lead me? Is my natural inclination to pray? That's indicative that you have the Spirit.

Do I see the work of the Holy Spirit in me pointing out sin or affirming what I'm doing right or pointing me toward things that I need to do more of or do better?  
Am I discovering new horizons of wonder of walking with God? That's all the work of the Holy Spirit. That's proof that you're a believer. Non-believers don't have these experiences, brothers and sisters.

That's reserved for us who are in Christ. But you might say, but I still feel doubt. It's okay. Hard circumstances, personal sin in our lives, these things foster doubt.

[ 45 : 01 ] Tough passages like Colossians 1.23 foster doubt. Take it back to God. Wrestle with God. Ask Him. Wrestle in community.

Brothers and sisters, we have to love each other well enough that we can let ourselves be honest with each other. I am struggling with this sin. This is not the response to judge or to shake your finger.

Might be a sin this night, a particular problem for you. But we all know you got something over here that's your problem. We need to be able to care for each other in that way. We need to love in community.

We need to struggle in community and be reminded in community that God loves us. Have you put your trust in Christ? Yes. Do you believe the word of God is true?

Yes. Do you see evidence of God's work in your life? Yes. But I still doubt. Okay. Let's take our doubts back to the truth. And at that point, you have to say to your doubt, doubt, stop talking.

[ 46 : 11 ] Silence. Doubt. I know whom I have believed. I know that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

There comes a point where you just have to shut doubt down. Or just recommit your life to Christ. If you really think, I really don't think I'm a believer.

Okay. You've obviously got enough conviction of sin and problems that just pray the prayer. Allow God to work in your heart. Allow him to change your will. But don't be afraid of doubt.

Step into it and embrace it. Make it your own. Um... Dallas Willard... I'm going to close with this statement. Dallas Willard's writing has really influenced me a lot.

This is a variation of the question that I talked about the last two weeks from Del Tackett. If you really believe what you say you believe, even if there's just a little bit, yeah, I do believe what I say I believe.

[ 47 : 15 ] Act like it's true. I'm not sure God answers prayer. Well, pray and find out. I'm not sure God provides. Take a risk. When you feel a push from the Holy Spirit to act, obey.

Act as if it's true because what you'll find is in your experience you'll discover it is true. It's the truest truth that you could ever know. It's life.

So leave here with a heart of worship. You are enduring because of the work of God in your life.

Amen? God, we're so grateful for your work in our lives.

Teach us to trust you in every little thing. In Jesus' name, amen.