



Genesis 15:6 says this about Abraham

Genesis 15:6
“... Abraham believed the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Through the prophet Habakkuk the Spirit of God confirmed what God had revealed throughout the OT Scriptures...

Genesis 15:6

... Abraham believed the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Habbakuk 2:4

The righteous will live by faith.

It is important to ask, how does one become righteous?
Romans 3:21-22 answers ...

Genesis 15:6

... Abraham believed the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Habbakuk 2:4

The righteous will live by faith.

Romans 3:21-22

...the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify... and is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

How does one come to have faith in Jesus Christ?
Romans 10:17 answers –

Romans 10:17

...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

As Ephesians 2:8 says.. when the message of Christ is heard, and believed, ...

Romans 10:17

...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Ephesians 2:8

...we are saved by grace through faith in Christ.

Hebrews 11:6 says...

Romans 10:17

...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Ephesians 2:8

...we are saved by grace through faith in Christ.

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

As 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, a defining characteristic of Jesus' followers is that we...



Hebrews 11:25-27

²⁵ [Moses] chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

Like Moses...

...by faith...we choose to identify with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin;

...by faith...we regard disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures offered to us by our culture;

...by faith...we set our hearts on pilgrimage and follow Christ and do not fear the anger of our culture for doing so.... because...

**Our eyes are fixed
on him
who is invisible.**

On December 12 and 19, I spoke with you of two life priorities I believe we must pursue after in 2022.

The National Post published this article on December 24, 2021

NATIONAL POST

While church attendance among Canadians plunges, belief in God stays nearly the same: poll

All provinces saw declines in the number of people attending services, but Quebec saw the biggest drop, with people going to church often and occasionally falling from 33% to 8%

Attendance is sparse at the Easter Sunday service at St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica in London, Ontario, amid COVID restrictions, April 4, 2021. PHOTO BY MIKE HENSEN/POSTMEDIA/FILE



In this article Jack Jedwab, who is the president and CEO of The Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) said, **“The drop in [church] attendance reveals that Canadians have been able to separate their religious beliefs... and the physical act of attending church service.”**

He went on to say, **“It is possible [during Covid] that people made recourse to virtual platforms for attending religious services. Still, it [the drop in church attendance] speaks to the personal side of religious conviction... as opposed to the need for the group or communal feeling.”**

Without question the health measures required during Covid impacted church attendance... how could it not!?

Mr. Jedwab suggested... as a possibility... that people used a virtual platform for gathering... which we know was the reality for many of us.

But I remind us that the teaching of Scripture is that our participation in a local church is not intended by God to be separated from... the personal practice of our faith.

When we are saved... we are born of the Spirit... into a spiritual family.

Belonging to and participating in a local church is not optional.... it's not something one does if they are not strong enough to make it on their own.

The Bible nowhere champions a lone ranger faith.



We walk with God as we walk in fellowship with other believers.

This is why I emphasized on December 12... that worshipping together in person on Sunday must be one of our life priorities as we head into 2022.

Because we love God, we gather together as his people to adore him and to delight in him and in his salvation.

The second life priority that I put before you on December 19 is that we are a people of the Book, who feast on the breathed words of our God.

Romans 12:2 says that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind.

And how are our minds renewed?

As we, according to Colossians 3:16...

Colossians 3:16
...let the word of Christ
dwell in us richly...

The word of Christ cannot dwell in us... richly... if we are not reading the Scriptures...extensively.

Don Carson writes that in order to be a people of the Book, we will have to confront issues that would distract or derail us from this priority.

Issues such as...

1. A lack of discipline (laziness)
2. The pace of our life – where the urgent seems to regularly trump the important
3. Our love of entertainment

As a people who live by faith and not by sight, it is the Spirit who teaches us that God's breathed out words are...



...as Peter wrote in his first letter, 2:2, “...**pure spiritual milk...**”

It is the Spirit who stirs in us a craving, that is, a strong desire for the word of God, ... an appetite, as Peter wrote... like that of a baby for its mother's milk.

We feast on God's written word... because this is the food that feeds and nourishes the new creation we have become through faith in Jesus.

We feast individually each day.

We feast together on Sundays as we sing God's word, read it, pray it, are taught it and respond to it.

We also feast on God's word as we study it and talk about it in our Discipleship groups.

Many of you have made this a priority of your lives.
Many of you are in a Discipleship triad or quad.
As we've gathered together in these small groupings throughout the fall to study the word, what we are building is a vital spiritual habit, that is of the utmost importance if we are to be strong in the Lord.

This leads me to speak with you, in our remaining time, about a third life priority... prayer.

When Jesus' disciples observed him praying... they asked...
..teach us to pray.

Jesus answered them and said, **"When you pray, say..."**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, for we also have forgiven
everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.**

When we pray, Jesus taught us to remember who we speak with....
...**our Father in heaven** – this is who God is to us because of Jesus.

And before we ask anything of God, Jesus teaches us that is important to acknowledge certain things to God – not that God doesn't know these things about himself; but that we remind ourselves of these things...

- that his name is holy
- that his kingdom come
- that his will be done

But Jesus had more to teach his disciple about prayer.

In verse 5-8 he told his disciples a parable.

“Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’

And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him the bread because of friendship, yet because of the man’s persistence he will surely get up and give him as much as he needs.”

What was the point of the parable?

When you pray... be persistent.

Jesus spoke again about persistence in Luke 18.

He told his disciples another parable in order, as v.1 says, **“to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”**

This is the parable Jesus taught his followers, Luke 18:2-5:

“In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ “For some time he refused.

But finally, he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’”

Was Jesus saying that we should always pray and not give up because God is reluctant to answer us, and we need to wear him down?

Absolutely not!

We know this because of the explanation Jesus provided for the disciples, v.7-8:

And will not God bring about justice
for his chosen ones,
who cry out to him day and night?
Will he keep putting them off?

I tell you, he will see that they get justice,
and quickly...

Before we believed in Jesus and received him into our lives, we were in charge of ourselves, we were at the center, we spent time, energy and resources taking care of ourselves.

But when we begin to follow Jesus, we live with a different orientation – with Jesus at the center.

Jesus assures us that the Father hears the prayers of his chosen ones.

He hears us because he loves us.

Prayer is how we daily practice our dependence upon God... learning to look to him for all things.

As God grows us up in our faith, as he is active to finish in us what he began... he is training us to not only trust his provision but to also to trust his timing.

Griffin Gullede writes... that the Father's ultimate purpose is to conform us to the likeness of Jesus.

What this means is that if the Father delays an answer to our prayers, it is not because he is too busy or doesn't care or cruelly wishes to inflict pain on us.

Rather, he is at work forming and conforming our character, making us ready for his answer.

What Jesus said in Luke 18:8b at first sounds strange, like it doesn't belong with the parable and its explanation.

And will not God bring about justice
for his chosen ones,
who cry out to him day and night?
Will he keep putting them off?

I tell you, he will see that they get justice,
and quickly...

However, when the Son of Man comes,
will he find faith on the earth?

What did Jesus mean?

Our practice of prayer is a key means by which we live by faith and not by sight.

By faith we look to him who is invisible and by faith we trust him to providentially provide and care for us... even when he chooses to make us wait.

When God delays answering our prayers, our default is to revert to how we lived before Jesus – to take care of #1; to do what's good for us.

But followers of Jesus, our lives are not our own – we've been bought with a price – the life of Jesus.

And the Father is growing us up, he is making us ready to live with him in the new heavens and earth.

If the Father would go to such lengths to provide for our salvation, why would we ever think he would forget us or forsake us?

He won't!

And so, we pray in faith; and we keep on praying in faith... in any and every situation.

This issue of persistence is an important one.

Come back to Luke 11.

Once Jesus finished with the parable of the man who kept asking for a loaf of bread, look at what he said next to his disciples:

Luke 11:9-10

**“Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives;
the one who seeks finds;
and to the one who knocks,
the door will be opened.”**

Jesus is not saying we need to bug God; to wear him down.
How do we know this?

Look carefully at what Jesus said.

Ask because... it will be given to you.

Seek because... you will find.

Knock because... the door will be opened to you.

There was one last piece Jesus taught his followers in Luke 11.

Luke 11:11-13

**“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish,
will give him a snake instead?
Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?**

**If you then, though you are evil, know how to give
good gifts to your children, how much more will
your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those
who ask him!”**

Jesus assures us the Father in heaven is a good father... who gives good things to his children, of which his best gift is... the Holy Spirit.

While you and I are in regular need of our daily bread and forgiveness for our sins... according to Jesus... what we most need, what we are to ask for above all things... is that the person of God's Spirit be with us and in us.

Romans 8:26 says...

Romans 8:26
**The Spirit helps us in our weakness.
We do not know what we ought to
pray for..."**

We live by faith and not by sight...and prayer is no exception.

God knows that sometimes we don't know what to pray for.

He knows that other times, as James 4 says, we don't ask of him and therefore we don't have.

And he knows, there are times when we ask him for wrong things and for the wrong reasons.

But as he does in everything...God helps us by his Spirit.

We've talked about prayer that speaks to God about our daily needs.

But another facet of prayer concerns the mission we are on with Jesus, and I want to wrap up our time by addressing this kind of prayer.

Through the pandemic, it has become obvious to those who are in relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, that what the article in the National Post describes... is Jesus... using the analogy of John 15... pruning his church.



Jesus is pruning his church for the purpose of harvest.

How do we know that?

Because of what John 3:17 says.

John 3:17
**God did not send his Son
into the world
to condemn the world,
but to save the world
through him.**

Jesus is actively building his church.

And Jesus is also actively at work in this world in order to save the lost.

And in his work of salvation, to save and to build his church, Jesus uses his followers.

As the board has prayed and talked together throughout the months of Covid, we have come to a place where we believe this is what Jesus is calling us to do.... to focus on loving him, loving others and serving passionately in his name.

And so in 2022 our Sunday gatherings will be a key priority for us.

Because we love God, we will gather to worship him together with the expectation that God will meet with us, and that his joy will be our strength.

In 2022 our Discipleship triads and quads will be a key priority for us.

Because we love others, we will study the word in community with the expectation that the Holy Spirit will teach us.

In 2022 we will serve in Jesus' name and in doing so, bless others with the goodness of God that we ourselves have experienced, with the expectation and hope that many others will come to know and love Jesus,

And in 2022, we will pray...

- We will pray on Sundays, and in our Discipleship groups and in our teams that serve on Jesus' behalf.... pleading with God to send his Spirit like a wind to blow the life of heaven into a culture that stinks of death.
- We will pray.... because we are desperate for God to show his glory and the power of the gospel to save everyone who believes.
- We will pray because the Holy Spirit is stirring us to do so... he is placing in our hearts a holy discontent with the way things are.
- We will pray with expectation that wisdom and power from heaven will be granted to us that we might know... what to do... what to say...and when... and where... and how.
- We will pray that the kingdom of God increases in Sooke.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, based upon his study of Scripture...

“Spiritual breakthroughs do not happen without prayer.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Mac Pier writes...

“Spiritual breakthroughs do not happen without prayer.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“The speed of gospel advance is in proportion to our prayers.”

Mac Pier

Let us take courage church...
...and... pray together.

After our first parents opened the door to sin and death, the story of the Bible details the lengths ...which God went to... in the person of Jesus Christ, in order to reverse and to restore what had been ruined.

In Jesus Christ God became flesh and lived among us.

The Bible reveals that... Jesus is the second Adam.

When he was 33 years of age, he offered his perfect life in sacrifice in order to pay humanity's sin debt.

Three days after he died, he rose from the dead and was seen by many eyewitnesses.

Forty days after his resurrection, he bodily ascended into heaven in triumph and glory.

There in heaven, Jesus rules over all things, seen and unseen.

At a future moment, that is unknown, but is imminent, Jesus will visibly return to the earth, as the Judge who will make all things right.

At that time, as Isaiah foretold, 11:9, “**...the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.**”

This is when God will make all things new.

Those who hear the message of Christ and believe are saved ... and are gathered by the Spirit into local communities which the Bible speaks of as the church.

Jesus told his followers, Matthew 16:18, “**... I will build my church.**”

What this means is that right now, from heaven, where he rules over all things, Jesus is actively building his church here upon the earth.

The church is dearly loved by Jesus Christ, who, as Ephesians 5:25-27 says, “**...gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**”

The church on earth is not a place where perfect people gather.

We are a community of those who have been rescued and redeemed from the power of sin; we are a people whose characters are being transformed to be like Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 5:14 Jesus described his church, as being, **“the light of the world.”** What did he mean by that, especially in light of who Jesus said he is... John 8:12, **“I am the light of the world.”**

The church function like a mirror... reflecting the glory of Jesus’ person. Or using the analogy, used by Jesus in Matthew 5, the church is a **“...city on a hill [that] cannot be hidden.”**

In the last days, the fight for identity has never been more intense. But we are grateful that God has provided the Spirit who testifies to our hearts regarding our identity. Through him we know that **“... we are children of God...”** and **“...are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ.”** 1 John 5:19

The spiritual darkness within the world is increasingly oppressive and would smother our faith if it could. But we are grateful that God has provided the Spirit who confirms to our hearts that **“...the One who was born of God keeps us safe, and the evil one cannot harm us.”** 1 John 5:18

And concerning prayer,

To the prophet Micah this is who God revealed himself to be, 2:12-13...

“I will surely bring together the remnant...I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their King will pass through before them, the Lord at their head.”