



Last Words

The book of Acts 20:13-38

Sooke Baptist Church

Sunday, September 13, 9am and 11am

7110 West Coast Road

Facebook Live Stream, 9am; YouTube, noon

Coffee/question:

If you were to move away from Sooke, knowing that you would never return, what things would you want to say to your friends; to your church family?



Today's passage recorded what the apostle Paul said to a very specific group of individuals – the elders of the church in Ephesus.

Knowing he would never see them again, there were things Paul needed to say to them; things he wanted them to remember; things he viewed as important for them to hold on to, as well as emphasize to the church.

What Paul said to the Ephesian elders is also profitable, encouraging and pertinent for elders in any church and in every generation.

But this passage is not just applicable to elders.

There are enduring truths that connect to the lives of every follower of Jesus.

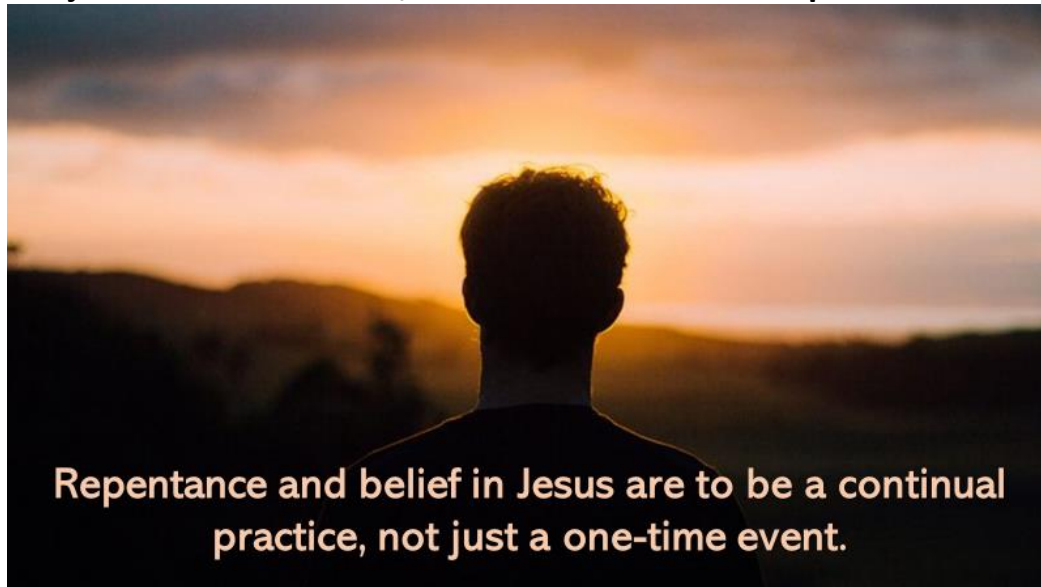
Read the passage.

There are a number of points of connection in this passage.

I want to point out to you three.

Look again at v.21. "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

While this is how one begins to follow Jesus, repentance and belief in him are not just a one-time event, but are to be a continual practice.

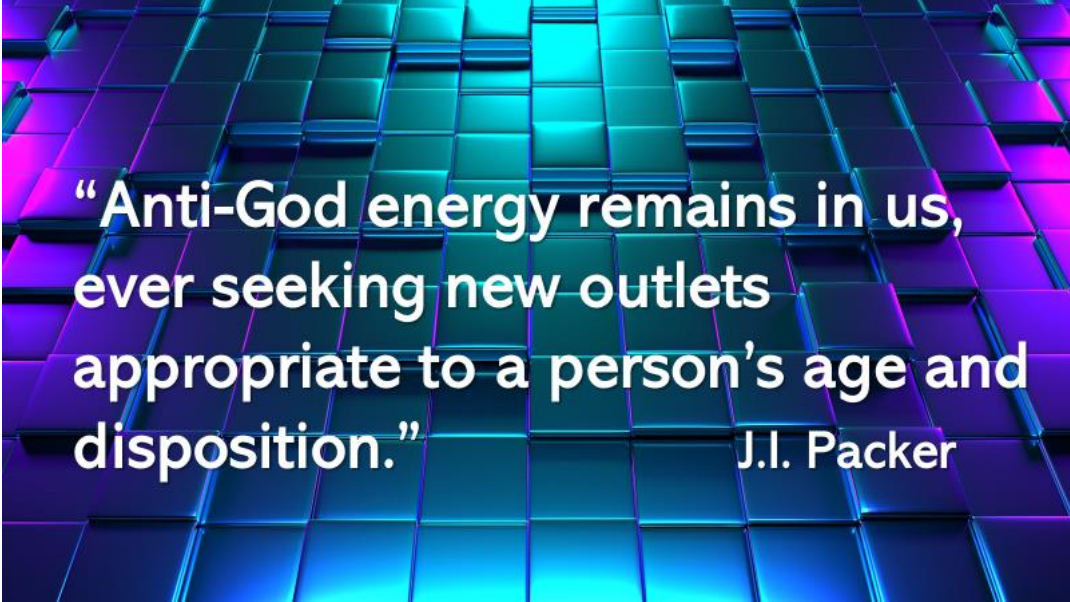


Let me explain.

Though dethroned, sin is still present with the believer.

- This is why, until Jesus returns or we pass from this life to the next, the follower of Jesus will continue to experience within them the inclination and impulse to do what God forbids.
- This is why there is conflict within the believer; why we find ourselves at times to be reluctant to do the will of God; why we are prone to make excuses for our mediocrity.

I like how J.I. Packer explains it:

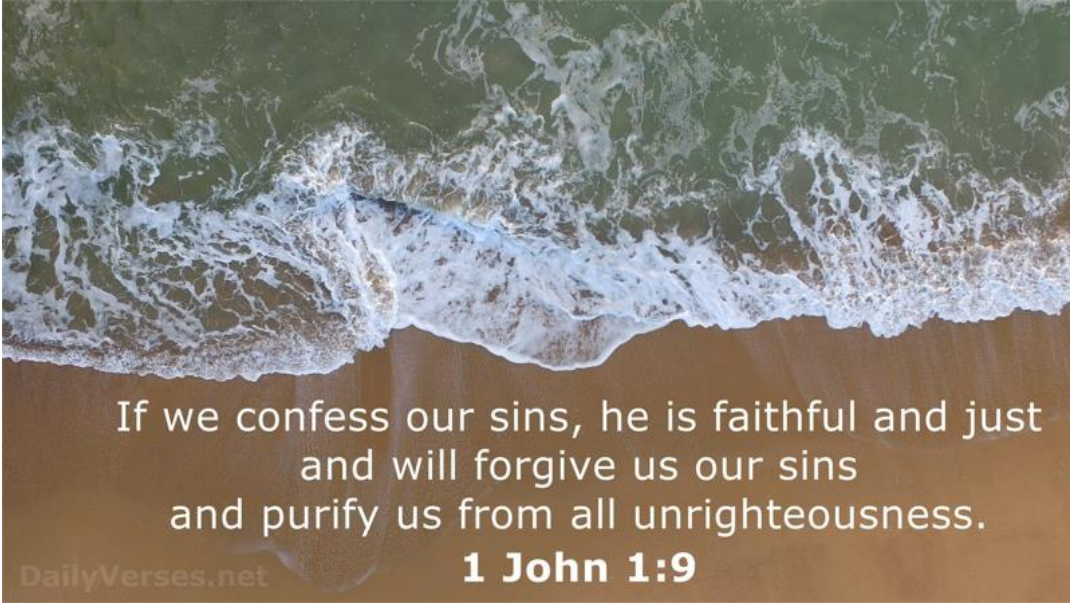


**“Anti-God energy remains in us,
ever seeking new outlets
appropriate to a person’s age and
disposition.”** J.I. Packer

This is why, follower of Jesus...at every moment of our life we need God’s pardoning mercy.

And praise God... this pardoning mercy is freely and repeatedly given through faith in Jesus.

How is this mercy appropriated?

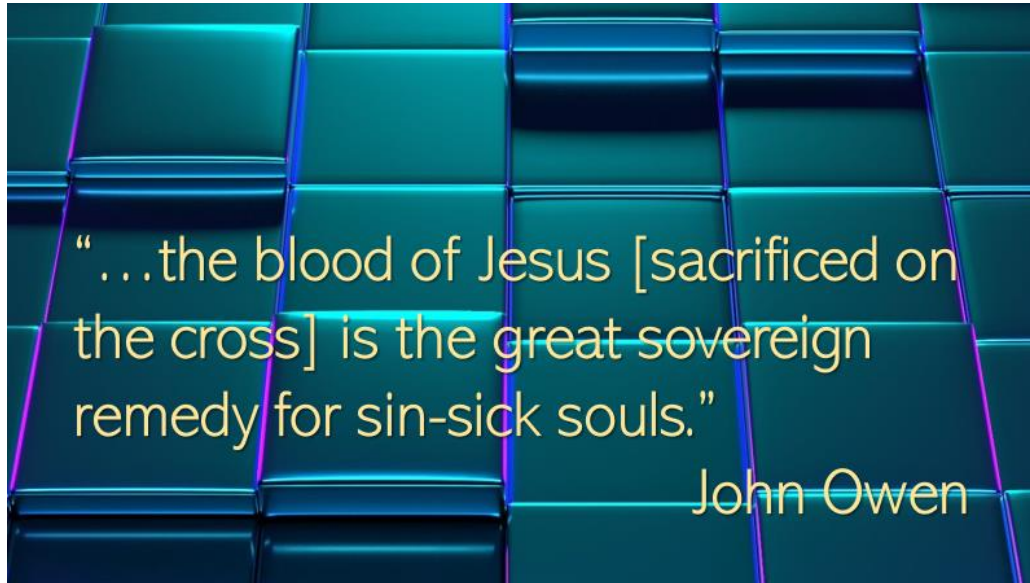


If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

DailyVerses.net

John Owen wrote:

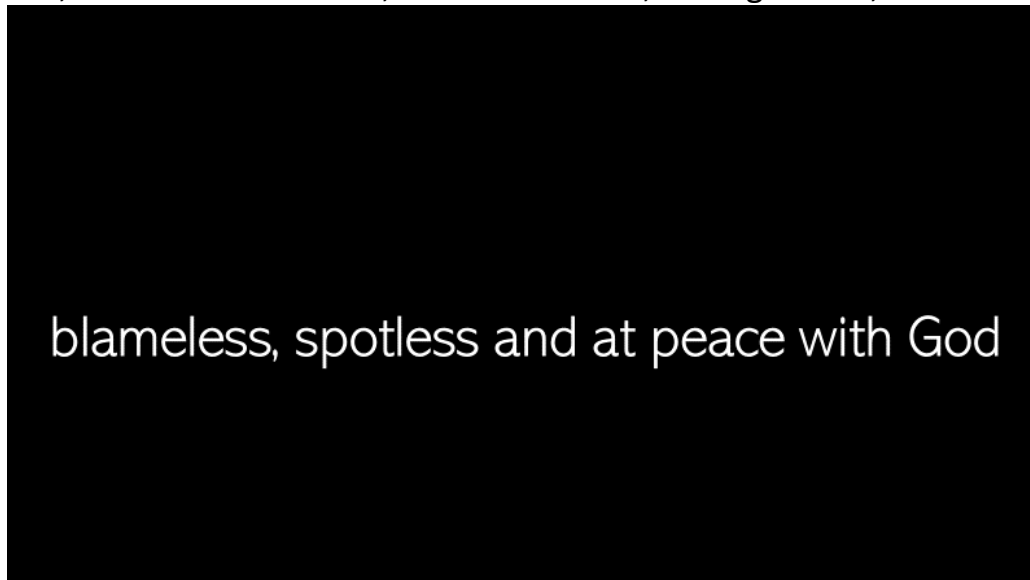


He went on to say...

"Through the great providence of God [every follower of Jesus] will live to see their sin dead at their feet."

John Owen was not in any way suggesting that the follower of Jesus will become perfect, that is, completely and utterly freed from sin in this lifetime.

But, in the here and now, the believer can, through Jesus, be

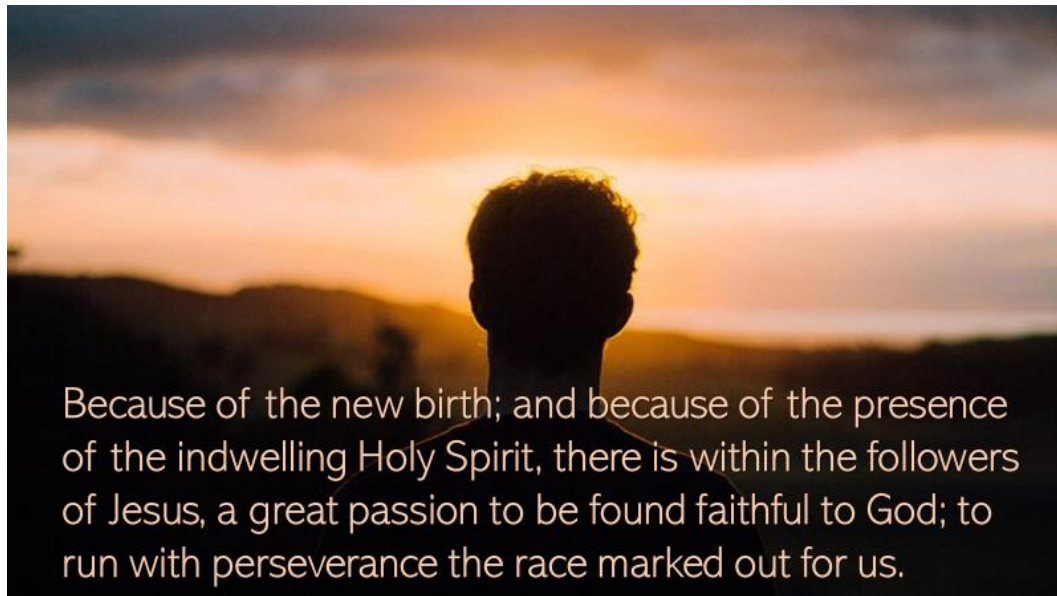


See 2 Peter 3:14.

How is this possible?

By turning to God in repentance and having faith in Jesus Christ.
This is what Paul had preached.
It is how one begins to follow Jesus.
It is also how one lives every day of their life thereafter.

v.24. "I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."



See Hebrews 12:1-3

Throughout my life I've met people who gave up on following Jesus.
It grieves my heart every time I hear such stories.

In Jesus' day, when many turned back and no longer followed him, he said to the twelve, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" John 6:67
I love Peter's reply.

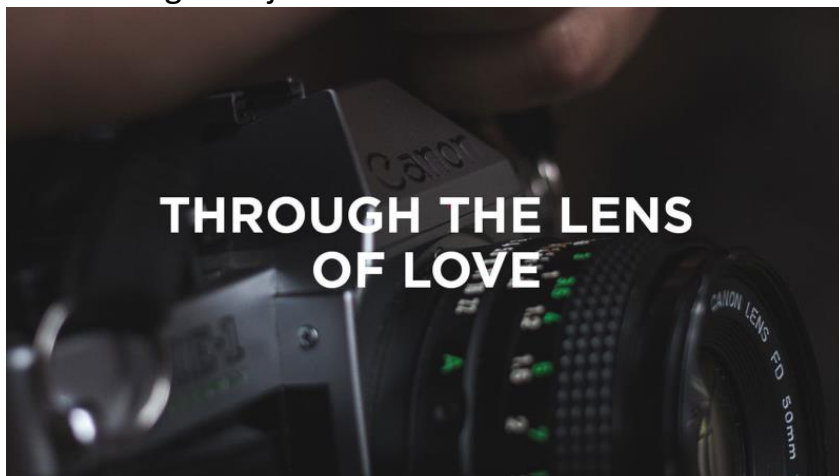
“To whom shall we go?”

He said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” John 6:68-69

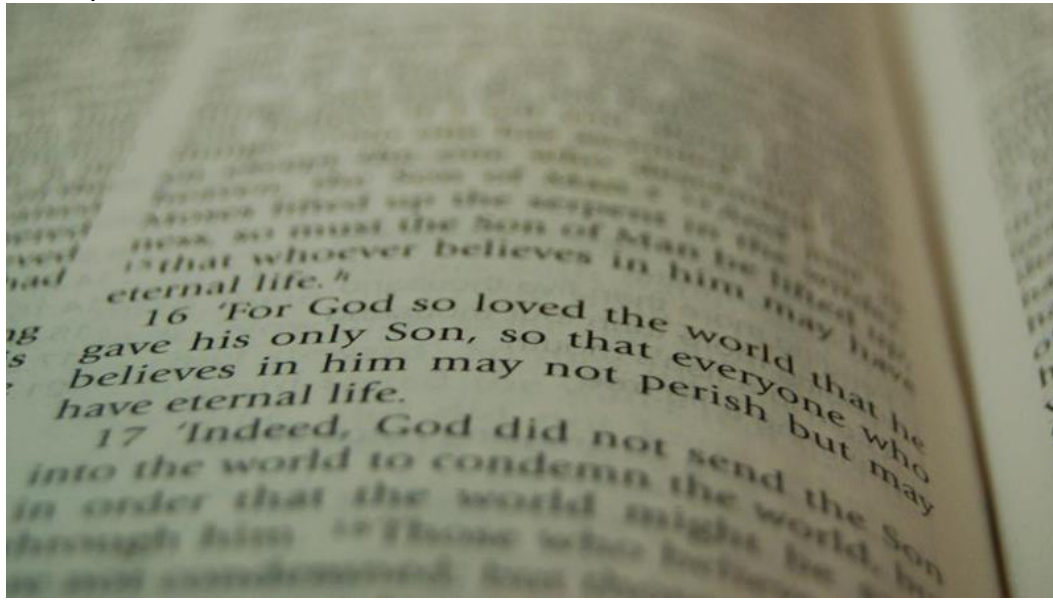
Who else is there but Jesus?

- He left heaven and came to the earth for us.
- Throughout his lifetime he did everything God the Father asked of him.
- At the end, he could have called for angels to rescue him, but he didn't.
- When taken to Golgotha, he laid down on the cross; he permitted nails to be driven into his hands and feet.
- Because of his love for us, he finished what he had come to the earth to do.
- He was faithful to his dying breath.
- With the sacrifice of his life, he paid our sin debt in full.

These things I've just described will not make sense unless seen...

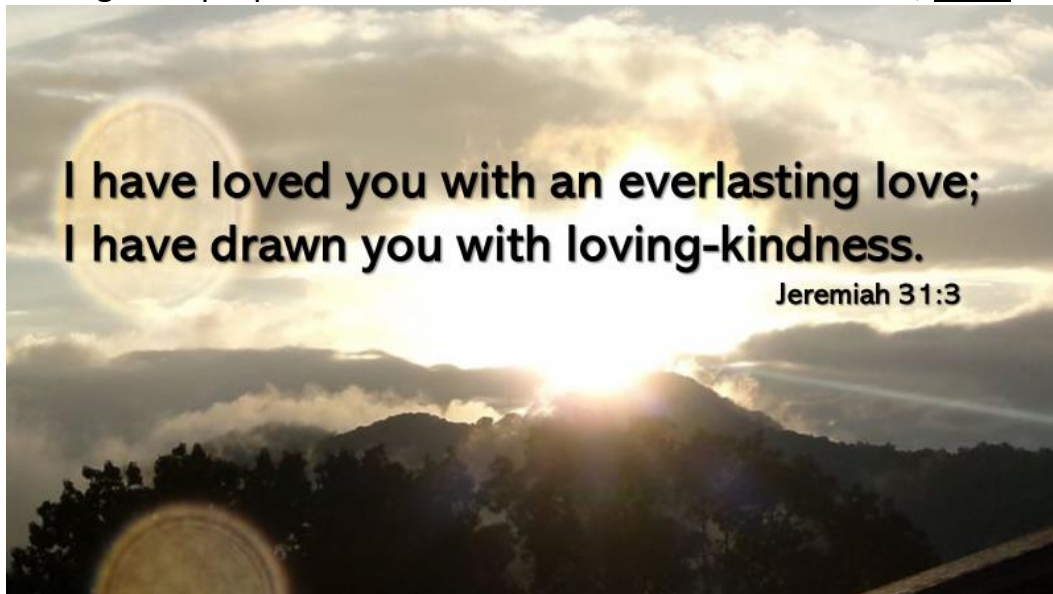


The apostle John wrote, John 3:16:



“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”

Through the prophet Jeremiah God described his love for us, 31:3:



In the Bible, God repeatedly speaks of his love towards us.

On the cross, Jesus decisively demonstrated that love.

If anyone was to ask – how do I know God loves me?... the answer is always – look to the cross.

How will you and I finish well?

How will we stay faithful to God... to our dying breath?

Do you remember what Jesus said when he spoke to the church at Ephesus?
He told them that they had forsaken the love they had for him at first.
Is there any statement more heart-breaking – you don't love me like you used to?

But then Jesus called the people of that church back to him...back to their first love. See Revelation 2:4
This is who God is; this is what he does.

Before God revealed himself to us, we were his enemies.
And yet he pursued us nonetheless.
Through faith in Jesus he adopts us into his family – as his children.
God is not reserved in how he loves us.
He is not stingy, dribbling out a little love here, a little love there.

Look at what 1 John 3:1 says:

**See what great love the Father has
lavished on us, that we should be
called the children of God.**

1 John 3:1



From all eternity the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have lived in a community of love.

And it is into this community, this family... that we are welcomed, embraced and loved.

How will you and I finish the race of our life?

How will we complete the purpose for which God created us; how will we carry out the task which God has entrusted to us?

As we love our God and Savior supremely... with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength. See Deuteronomy 6:5.

As Paul spoke with the Ephesian elders he said to them, v.18...

" You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia."

- Those elders had seen the evidence that Paul had been gripped by the great love of God...this was why Paul's life was so radically God-oriented.
- I'm certain that Paul had told them of how he had been a disciple of Gamaliel. But when the risen Jesus appeared to him, Paul's great boast forever after was that he belonged to Jesus.... that he was the servant of Jesus, regardless of the challenging circumstances this commitment brought into his life. He said, v.19 that he had faced and lived through – tears and severe testing.
- Of all the spirits active in the world of that day, and the Ephesian elders knew first hand of the presence and effects of these malignant beings, they had seen that Paul had yielded his life to the Holy Spirit of God...who compelled him, v.22, and whom... Paul willingly followed.
- Though he held Roman citizenship, after he met Jesus, Paul's allegiance was to the kingdom of God; and the values by which Paul lived were not those of Rome, but of Jesus Christ.

None of us are immune!

There exists the possibility, that if we become careless, or distracted, or lose sight of Jesus, or become weary or disappointed, and I could go on... that our hearts could become hard and cold.

If you have forsaken your first love, what are you to do?

Jesus tells us in Revelation 2:5

Revelation 2:5
Consider how far you have fallen!
Repent and do the things
you did at first.

Come back to where you began.

Start over.

Repent. Turn to God. Confess your sin. Believe in Jesus.

The great purpose of life is to know, to love, to enjoy and to serve the King of heaven and earth.

Jesus is worthy of your vigorous, robust, whole-hearted love and faith!

v.24. Jesus tasked Paul to testify “to the good news of God’s grace.

v.27. “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”



The Christian faith is a passed-on faith.

Christianity is always one generation away from extinction.

And this is by God's design – no one is born a Christian; you become one. Until Jesus' return, in this present time, there exists, in Paul's own words... see v.29,30



You and I are here today because previous generations of those who followed Jesus were faithful to do what Paul told the Ephesians elders to do.

- They kept watch.
- They were on their guard.
- They passed on the faith.
- They committed those who believed and were sanctified... their family, their friends, their neighbors, their colleagues... to God and to the word of his grace, which builds up and gives an inheritance.

We often speak of passing on the faith to those who are outside of the church. And this is our calling.

But I want to impress upon you this morning, that the passing on of the faith also happens in the church – to the children and youth who come here with their families.

All of us, whether these kids are ours or not, have opportunity to influence and speak the gospel into their lives.

No one is born a Christian; you become one.

Before Covid-19, the children of this church... would worship in song and prayer with everyone in this room, and then be dismissed to the Porch for a teaching time of their own... led by Maddi and team.

Since the middle of March, we have not been able to do this. And there is every possibility that this won't be able to happen for at least another six to nine months or longer.

We can either view this as a great tragedy or a great opportunity. Because...



... I view this as an opportunity.

I believe, more than ever, that Sunday morning, when the church gathers, is the most important, significant, transformative event of the week.

Do you know why?

Because the church gathers together...in the presence of the living God. Remember Jesus' promise – he is here with us.

Yes, a person can worship on their own...in their home...or in nature.

But it is not the same... as when the church composed of blood-bought believers, gathers to worship together – to sing, to pray, to read and be taught the breathed-out word of God.

There is no place, nothing that can replicate the church gathered... in the presence of God.

Parents let me affirm you... of all the things you teach your children, apart from leading them to receive Jesus as their Savior.... this is the most important.

Covid-19 has and continues to force us to re-evaluate, re-think and re-imagine how we do things.

All of us have had to simplify our schedules and in doing so, have we not marveled and commented to ourselves and others, “Why did we let ourselves become so busy?”

What is the opportunity God is giving to us in this time...in regards to passing on the faith to our children and teens?...as we gather on Sundays like we now are?

How does a child learn to speak?

By immersion.

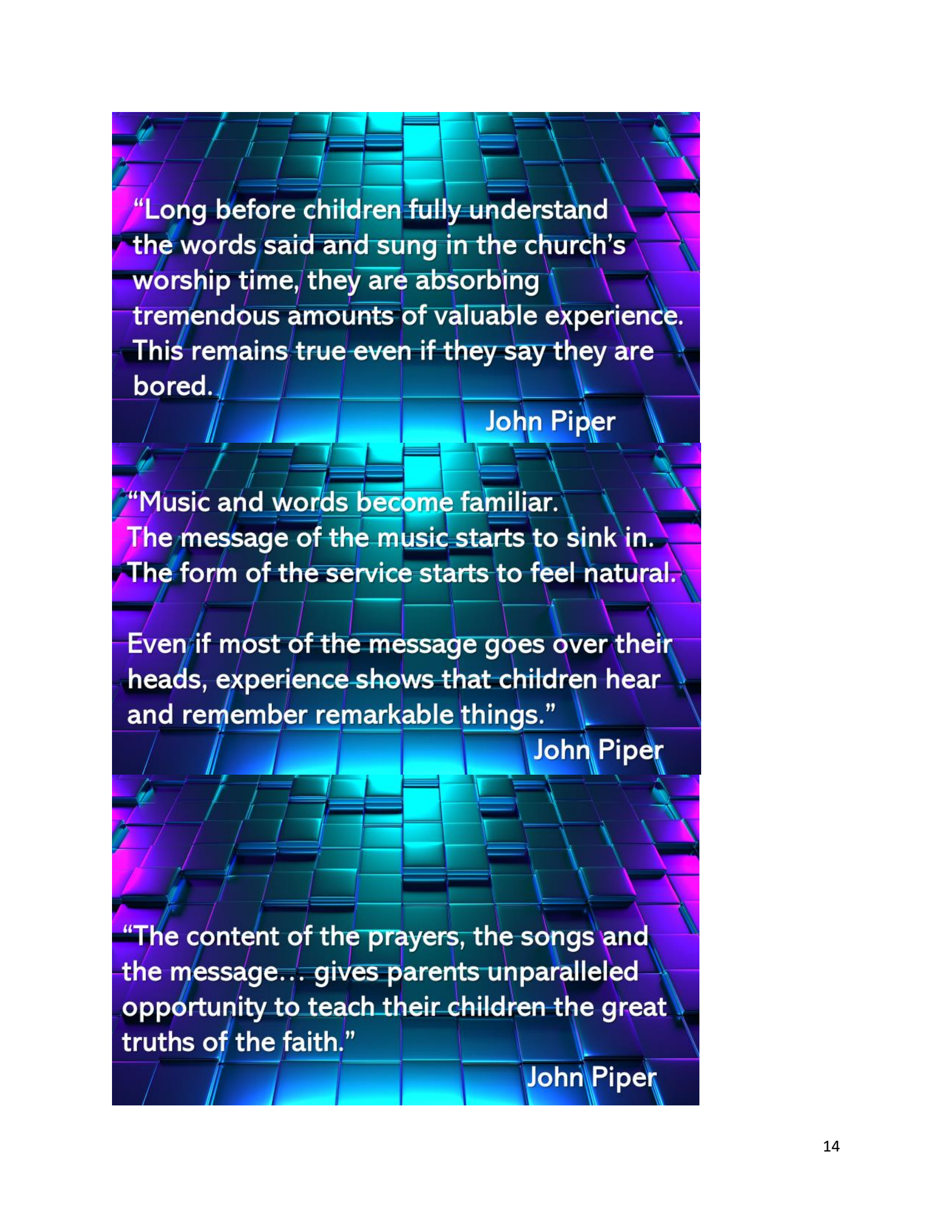
Do they understand every word you say to them in their early years?

Of course not.

But they do hear your tone; they do see your facial expressions; and through repeated interactions they slowly begin to learn vocabulary and grammar and pronunciation.

Do you realize it is the same with our children and youth when it comes to the reality, the priority and the worship of God with the church gathered?

John Piper says...



“Long before children fully understand the words said and sung in the church’s worship time, they are absorbing tremendous amounts of valuable experience. This remains true even if they say they are bored.

John Piper

“Music and words become familiar. The message of the music starts to sink in. The form of the service starts to feel natural.

Even if most of the message goes over their heads, experience shows that children hear and remember remarkable things.”

John Piper

“The content of the prayers, the songs and the message... gives parents unparalleled opportunity to teach their children the great truths of the faith.”

John Piper

Piper is right - there are and will be aspects of our worship service that will go over the heads of our children.

Why would we be surprised by this – they are beginners.

In faith we bring them...because God is here and we long for them to meet and to know him in the midst of his church.

They can observe, not just in their parents, but in all of us, our passion for, our enjoyment of and our delight in God, as we sing and pray and listen and respond to our great God.

They can hear and see our spoken and demonstrated love for one another because we are brothers and sisters through faith in Jesus.
We are family/

If you have health challenges that put you or a loved one or your children at a high risk, it goes without saying, you will need to continue to engage with this church on Sunday mornings on-line.

Maybe an option exists for you to extend your circle to include another brother or sister in the Lord with whom you watch the service, and then fellowship with.

But right now, I'm speaking to encourage those of us who are here physically...or should be.

We all know that Covid-19 has made coming to church a little more challenging. Singing with a mask – not my favorite thing.

But this is how we take care of each other.

I don't wear a mask for myself – I wear it for you, and you wear it for me and for the others who are here.

Is it challenging for you parents to have your kids with you for the whole hour?

Maybe it isn't. Maybe it is.

But church...and families...what an opportunity we have been given.

The greatest stumbling block for our children and our teens being here on Sunday morning is not boredom.

If we adults don't cherish, if we don't delight in God, if we come reluctantly rather than eagerly and with expectancy...I fear that we become a stumbling block to our kids.

They don't just learn from what we say, they learn from what we do.

I believe when we look back on this time, it will be remembered as a most precious time, a turning point in the life of this church....when adults and children and teens, in spite of the challenges that existed to do so, chose to gather on Sunday mornings to worship together with "tremendous seriousness, earnestness and expectancy" (words of John Piper) because of our love for Jesus.

He is our great treasure.

We love him with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our strength because he is worthy!

The Blessing

Acts 20:32