

The Body of Christ in West Seattle

Deciding to know nothing other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We have been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.** The life we live in the body **we live by faith** in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us (Galatians 2:20). Just prior to these words, Paul declared that he had 'died to the law' so that he might live to God. Those who rely on law (***our efforts to do things right or make things happen according to our plans***) will never be spared from God's judgment because his justice demands perfection. Only Jesus' death justifies us before God and gives us both present and eternal access to him. Our church visions can easily become laws that we idolize and work hard to live by. In the process, we do not see Christ and instead remain fixated on our own successes and failures.

Vision?

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Similarly, a vision for the Body of Christ should be a straight line. We do not need to make things more complex than simply Jesus. He alone is the One with the capability to transform us and lead us. All other sources fall exceedingly short and ultimately end in death. Therefore, we strive together to simply listen to Jesus and respond to Him in trust-filled obedience in the power of the Holy Spirit. **When the 'vision' and/or the pastor/leader become the focal point of the Body, trouble and deception enter.** Paul decided to **know nothing except Christ and Christ crucified.** He did not preach himself. He did not call people to himself but rather he rightly understood that he was simply to **point people towards Jesus.** The vision that a church holds must have the same function – to point people towards Jesus.

'Our' vision can neither save us nor can it save our city. Only Jesus can do that.

If we claim that our vision holds wisdom or power apart from Jesus, we have made Jesus less than he is. If we place our trust and assurance in our own abilities, we have made ourselves far more important than we actually are. If we feel that our vision or our plan adds something or makes better the work of Christ, we are saying that Jesus' death and resurrection is insufficient for us. Our assurance, sufficiency, confidence, competence, boasting, hope, and faith – all of these can only be in Jesus and nothing else. All other foundations will crumble and leave us helpless. Therefore our vision must not extend beyond, around, or above what God has ordained for us in this time

A few things to bear in mind as we discern and articulate 'a vision' for the Body of Christ.

- 🌐 **Jesus is the only person that has the authority to save us from death.** Because of this, our vision revolves around him whom we cannot control, manipulate, bribe, or blackmail. A vision statement runs the risk of focusing our attention on ourselves and what we do versus who God is and what he has done and is doing.
- 🌐 **God calls us into transformation and thus our character and maturity are (or should be) in a constant state of change.** As we mature, our understanding of God, his kingdom, and ourselves changes which means that our vision also changes and deepens. A vision statement runs the risk of stopping God's work of refinement and maturity in our lives.
- 🌐 God calls each of us personally into a relationship with himself whereby he speaks to us, leads us, and fills us with his Spirit. **A vision statement runs the risk of limiting, replacing, or distracting from God's personal and supernatural leadership in each of our lives.**
- 🌐 **All that we need to be equipped to be sent by Jesus is the Word of God.** A vision statement runs the risk of adding to, subtracting from, overlooking, or bypassing portions of Scripture. The best tool for interpreting Scripture is Scripture itself, not our own thoughts, wisdom, ideas, and opinions.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with *lofty speech or wisdom*. For **I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified**. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in **demonstration of the Spirit and of power**, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Our vision can neither save us nor can it save our city. Only Jesus can do that. Therefore, He is all that we seek to know.

The Big Picture

The Church of the 21st century in the United States is in severe crisis. Thousands of Christians are abandoning the Word of God and turning aside to **doctrines that do not depend on Christ**. Others have restricted and distorted the Word of God and use it for other purposes than pointing sinners to Jesus. We cannot bend the Word of God to our liking. We cannot attempt to fit the Bible into our plans and ambitions. Therefore **we hold our vision loosely knowing that God might need to change the way we think and the way we seek to live**. My intended purpose for this vision statement is to lead you to the Word of God so that God might show you in his Word what he says about himself and what he says about us. His Word is truth. His Word is life. His Word is at work in our midst. My first impulse in writing this is to simply say, **'Our vision is God's Word because it points us to Jesus'** (John 8:31-32). My hope is that I have been able to point you to some passages that bring the big picture into focus for everyday living.

- ***All things exist by Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus.***
- ***In Jesus, there is abundant life. Apart from him, there is only death.***
- ***Those who respond to God in love do so as a result of God's own power, authority, and grace.***
- ***God saves us for his own glory, pleasure, and purposes.***
- ***Our boast is Jesus and Jesus is revealed to us in the Word of God. If we want to know Jesus, we must hold fast to the Word of God and let go of all other things.***
- ***Jesus is coming back.***

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For **no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For **the wisdom of this world is folly with God**. For it is written, He catches the wise in their craftiness, and again, The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile. **So let no one boast in men.**
1 Corinthians 3:7-21b

The Big Picture

All things exist by Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed **the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world**. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and **he upholds the universe by the word of his power**. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you?"... Of the Son he says, "**Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.**" And, "**You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.**" Hebrews 1:1-5, 8-12

He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn of all creation**. For **by him** all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created **through him and for him**. And **he is before all things, and in him all things hold together**. And **he is the head of the body, the church**. He is the beginning, the **firstborn from the dead**, that in everything he might be **preeminent**. For **in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell**, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:15-20

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, **in order that** he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29

And Jesus came and said to them, **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

In Jesus, there is abundant life. Apart from him, there is only death.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. John 15:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **in order that** the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **But if Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:1-11

The Big Picture

Those who respond to God in love do so as a result of God's own power, authority, and grace.

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day... **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** And I will raise him up on the last day... **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail.** The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. John 6:35-40, 44, 63-65

Among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him—**these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.** For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also **no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:6-14

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Philippians 1:6-7

He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For **flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.** Matthew 16:15-17

God saves us for his own glory, pleasure, and purposes.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:28-30

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who **through him are believers in God,** who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:20-21

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, **so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, **to the praise of his glory.** Ephesians 1:11-14

Thus says the Lord GOD: **It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations** to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.... **It is not for your sake that I will act,** declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Ezekiel 36:22-23,32

The Big Picture

Our boast is Jesus and Jesus is revealed to us in the Word of God. If we want to know Jesus, we must hold fast to the Word of God and let go of all other things.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, **lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.** For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But **God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.** And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; **they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these.** Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Ecclesiastes 12:11-12

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel **by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,** and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. 2 Timothy 1:8-12

And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. Acts 3:16

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.**

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

I give thanks to my God always for you because of **the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge**—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

The Big Picture

Jesus is coming back.

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word **the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire**, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar**, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But **according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells**. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And **count the patience of our Lord as salvation**, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability**. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:1-18

And he told them a parable: Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things (See 21:5-28) taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But **watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap**. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But **stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man**. Luke 21:29-36

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. And he said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Revelation 20:11 - 21:1-8

When our faith and hope are in Jesus

Life in Jesus Christ happens when we **trust in the saving power and sufficiency of Jesus**. Life can only be given by Jesus and can only be received through the work and leadership of the Holy Spirit. Outside of this supernatural relationship [The Father sending His Son to die on our behalf; The Son reconciling us to the Father for now and eternity through His own death and resurrection; Jesus asking the Father to send to us the Holy Spirit to make us faithful to His Name] we have nothing.

- ***Jesus calls us to obey him so that he might bear fruit with our lives.***
- ***The Bible is not a rule-book or how-to manual. God reveals himself and his work in the Bible through the leadership and assistance of the Holy Spirit. In this way, we learn to listen to the voice of God and respond in obedience.***
- ***In Jesus, we have all that we need and thus we are free to abandon all other things.***
- ***We are a community called out of the world that we might take part in God's plan to draw men and women into his salvation. We participate under God's authority and behind his lead.***
- ***God has given all things to Jesus and he has given Jesus to the Church that we might be equipped to reach unity and maturity in Jesus.***
- ***The reason we gather together and work together is Jesus; and not because of talented human leaders, slick programs, likable ways of doing things, 'how much we get out of it', or even how much we enjoy one another.***
- ***We don't do our own good works but rather by faith we join in the work that God is presently doing.***
- ***We are not called to be cool, 'relevant' or 'productive'. Jesus calls us to serve and walk humbly; and to sacrifice our corporate and individual egos so that his glory will be displayed in our lives.***

When our faith and hope are in Jesus, we are acknowledging that **His name is above every other name in the universe**. We are acknowledging that **only He is sufficient to give us life**. And we are acknowledging that the life He gives is given through His commands.

Faith is a gift that God gives through His Word (See Romans 10:17). We cannot create faith or muster it up through positive thinking. It only comes from God. Faith convicts or convinces us of things not seen and assures us of what we are hoping for in Jesus Christ (See Hebrews 11:1). Further, faith in Jesus, which comes only from God, is the only way we can please God (See Hebrews 11:6). Living a 'good and moral' life will condemn us to our death.

We have hope when by faith we are 'fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised' (Romans 4:21). When we read God's Word, we are not looking for life lessons or 'the moral of the story' but rather we are receiving and being reminded of the promises of God through Jesus Christ for our salvation. His Word then sends us out to live by the faith and hope that are ours in Jesus Christ.

If we make the Christian life about principles, morals, activities, rhythms, values, what 'works' and life lessons we have only further alienated ourselves from God's saving power. If we read the Bible as a helpful manual to live a good and moral life than we have misunderstood that all Scripture points to the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. We quickly and frequently forget that our sin is our eternal death sentence and that apart from the mercy of God, death is our only fate.

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

Jesus calls us to obey him so that he might bear fruit with our lives.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and **every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. **As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.** I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you **keep my commandments**, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. John 15:1-19

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **according to** the foreknowledge of God the Father, **in the sanctification of** the Spirit, **for obedience to** Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, **he has caused us** to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who **by God's power are being guarded through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—**may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:1-9

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

In Jesus, we have all that we need and thus we are free to abandon all other things.

For to me **to live is Christ, and to die is gain**. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell... But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, **I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For his sake **I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him**, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may **share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death**, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:21-22; 3:7-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But **rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed**. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' Therefore **let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good**. 1 Peter 4:12-19

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided** we suffer with him **in order that** we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us**. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For **in this hope we were saved**. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But **if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience**. Romans 8:12-25

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

The Bible is not a rule-book or how-to manual. God reveals himself and his work in the Bible through the leadership and assistance of the Holy Spirit. In this way, we learn to listen to the voice of God and respond in obedience.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him... the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. John 14:15-17,21,26-27

I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, **he will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, **he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority**, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for **he will take what is mine and declare it to you.** All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:7-15

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, **which is at work in you believers.**

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:11-12

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and **it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.** I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? John 5:39-44

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For **the word of God is living and active**, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:11-13

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since **you have been born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, **through the living and abiding word of God**; for All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but **the word of the Lord remains forever.** And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:18-25

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

We are a community called out of the world that we might take part in God's plan to draw men and women into his salvation. We participate under God's authority and behind his lead.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us **run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, **do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**' It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later **it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Hebrews 12:1-13

But you are a **chosen** race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a **people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

1 Peter 2:9-12

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that **those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.** From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:10

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

God has given all things to Jesus and he has given Jesus to the Church that we might be equipped to reach unity and maturity in Jesus.

Now **may the God of peace** who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **equip you with everything good that you may do his will**, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, **that you may know** what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, **according to** the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **far above** all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And **he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.** Ephesians 1:15-23

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is **one body** and one Spirit—just as you were called to the **one hope that belongs to your call**—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is **over all** and **through all** and **in all**. But **grace was given** to each one of us **according to** the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' (In saying, He ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **so that** we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, **speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way** into him who is **the head**, into Christ, **from whom** the whole body, **joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped**, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:1-16

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

The reason we gather together and work together is Jesus; and not because of talented human leaders, slick programs, likable ways of doing things, 'how much we get out of it', or even how much we enjoy one another.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For **I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that **your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.** 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? **Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** Galatians 3:2-3

The one who speaks **on his own authority** seeks his own glory, but the one who **seeks the glory of him who sent him** is true, and in him there is no falsehood. John 7:18

You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For **what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.** Luke 16:15

Grace to you and peace **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, **according to** the will of our God and Father, **to whom** be the glory forever and ever. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: **If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.** For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? **If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.** For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:3-12

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,** being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, **he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.** Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Philippians 2:1-18

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

We don't do our own good works but rather by faith we join in the work that God is presently doing.

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. **We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day**; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. John 9:1-5

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, I follow Paul, and another, I follow Apollos, are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, **as the Lord assigned** to each. I planted, Apollos watered, **but God gave the growth**. So **neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth**. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. **According to the grace of God given to me**, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For **no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the **fire will test what sort of work** each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:1-15

And I am sure of this, that **he** who began a good work in you **will bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all **partakers with me of grace**, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Philippians 1:6-7

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure**. Philippians 2:13-14

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though **it was not I, but the grace of God** that is with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what **Christ has accomplished through me** to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed. Romans 15:18

Of this gospel I was made a minister **according to the gift of God's grace**, which was given me **by the working of his power**. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Ephesians 3:7-10

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister **according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you**, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:24-27

When our faith and hope are in Jesus...

We are not called to be cool, 'relevant' or 'productive'. Jesus calls us to serve and walk humbly; and to sacrifice our corporate and individual egos so that his glory will be displayed in our lives.

He must increase, **but I must decrease**. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. John 3:30-31

For what we proclaim is **not** ourselves, but **Jesus Christ as Lord**, with ourselves as **your servants for Jesus' sake**. For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that **the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us**. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For **we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh**. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believed, and so I spoke, we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:5-18

But whatever gain I had, I **counted as loss** for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. **For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:7-8

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, **so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory**. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, **to the praise of his glory**. Ephesians 1:11-14

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But **I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus**. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But **I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life**. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:12-17