



MY 2025 YEAR-IN-REVIEW: SHARING A SPIRITUAL “PE²P³” TALK

**RON VANCE
SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE
DECEMBER 14, 2025**

Caveat:

Today's Message is from my heart as a brother in Christ, sharing my own perspectives and not necessarily the views of others who have experienced similar loss, and not necessarily the spiritual conclusions or opinions of the other Elders or leaders at Cornerstone.

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- Todays “PEP Talk” is not a “Rah!, Rah! rally speech” – but is intended to do what good pep talks can do: to increase confidence, courage, and influence our thinking and behavior.
- In addition to the Caveat above, I want to share my journey, which includes both pain and movement towards JOY.
- I know there are many at Cornerstone that are experiencing great pain, suffering, and grief. And we all will in time.
- I hope this sharing can help you, as well.
- Please forgive me for reading from my presentation slide deck (which is very dense and full); however, I will only hit the highlights - and most of what I have hoped to offer is in the “leave behind” deck that include more than I can cover now.
- FYI, one the songs we sang (“Blessings”) was one she picked to share with me at an Elders Retreat about 3 years ago (including how God can work good things from our challenges and pain).
- Also the song “Oceans” we sang was her anthem of faith and trust in God - that she wanted as part of her memorial service, and our kids sang to her in her last week of life).

I. CONTEXT & APPROACH FOR THIS SPIRITUAL “PE²P³ TALK”

- Losing Kim has made 2025 the hardest year of my life, and likely for all our kids.
- More about Kim and Ron:
 - Part of loving but challenged families (with childhood trauma; bringing “baggage” into our relationships).
 - Met in July 1985; married in May 1986; became Christians in July 1987.
 - Enjoyed a 40+ year love story (adding 4 amazing children, 3 grandsons, and many pets in our family).
 - Worked through our challenges and sin with deep loyalty and commitment – and the help of spiritual advisors, therapists (when needed), and other devoted family members and friends.
 - Shared many ministries and passions – knowing we were our happiest when focused on serving others.
 - Treasured being best friends, deeply in love, and enjoyed the best chapter in our marriage these last 5+ years.
 - Were both shocked and unprepared by Kim’s pulmonary illnesses & extremely aggressive Stage 4 colon cancer.
 - Witnessed Kim’s grace and generosity for others through the very end.
- My grief has been devastating – including many “WAVES” that have been disorienting, soul-crushing, unpredictable, and have led me to examine and question all aspects of my life & faith.

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- Thank you, Cornerstone family - for all of the love and support.
- The 2 pictures on the stage with me (including (1) Kim and the 2 Word arts we summarized of your input at her Celebration of Life service; and (2) our wedding picture) are here to help me and us to continue to honor Kim today.
- Your cards and participation (including the over 400 that came to Kim’s memorial services and then our Celebration of Life at the church) were amazing.
- I am beyond words grateful for my kids, extended family (including Kim’s brother Kevin and his wife Manda), as well as so many of you, including the Dicksons, the Williams, the Alberts, the Laniers, as well as the Gardners and others on the Ministry team and Board.
- You have all been very patient with me.
- Our study of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity of God – which has led me to a deeper understanding of God’s love and desires for us, has been immensely helpful.
- Our theme scripture from Zechariah 4:6 (“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit”) has never been truer or more important for me.

I. CONTEXT & APPROACH FOR THIS SPIRITUAL “PE²P³ TALK”

- I am learning a lot about pain, suffering, and grief on this journey.
- I respect that each person grieves in their own, unique way – but often share similar experiences.
- While there are some common “stages”, they are not always linear, sometimes overlap, and often repeat.

Examples of Grief & Loss	“The Five Stages of Grief” (per Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross)	An Alternative “10 Stages of Grief”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of a loved one • Relationship loss (e.g., separation, divorce, etc.) • Physical (e.g., illness, injury, disability, etc.) • Mental/Psychological • Financial / Possessions • Job / Career • Reputation / Position • Failed Dreams / Ambitions • Faith / Beliefs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Denial 2. Rage & Anger 3. Bargaining 4. Depression 5. Acceptance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shock 2. Emotional Release 3. Depression 4. Physical Symptoms 5. Anxiety 6. Hostility 7. Guilt 8. Hesitancy to Renew Normal Activities 9. Healing of Memories 10. Acceptance for One's New Role in Life

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- I have learned so much more about grief since Kim has died - and have not been a stranger to the loss of a loved one – but nothing like this.
- I realize that with grief, you don’t just get over it or move on.
- Rather, you have to learn to deal with it and move forward.
- Kim knew I would need help and made me promise to do so.
- In addition to friends and family, I have received much needed grief counseling (from Steve Brand and Julie Waters) – from my agreement with Kim and my kids. These are some of the materials that they have help provide.
- These grief “stages” can be overwhelming, and they impacted me deeply from a spiritual place, as well.

I. CONTEXT & APPROACH FOR THIS SPIRITUAL “PE²P³ TALK”

- Part of my “waves” of grief have included deep shock, confusion, pain, frustration, as well as many questions, including but not limited to the following:

Some of the Big Questions I Have Been Wrestling With *(and not necessarily in this order)*

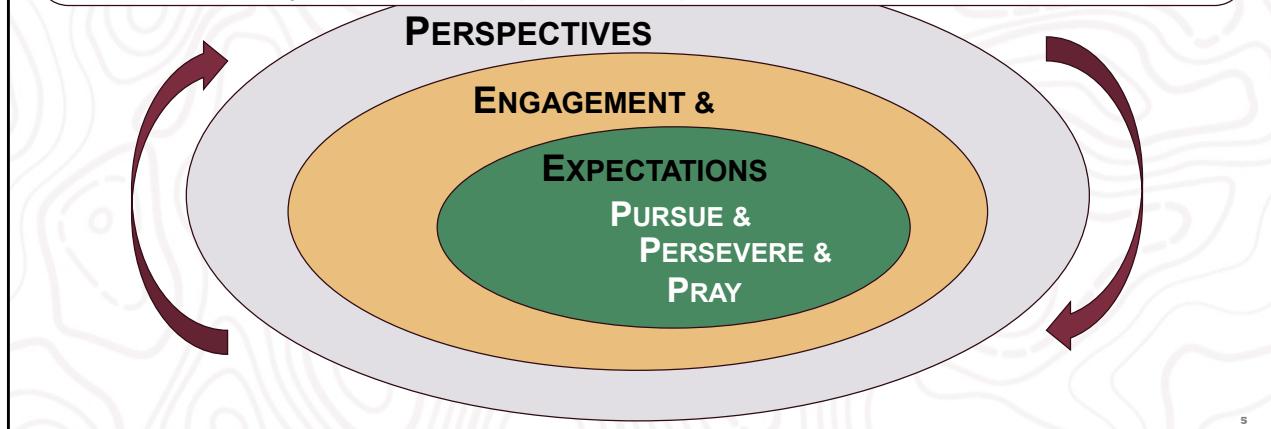
- How could this happen to us?
- Does the God that I thought I knew really exist?
- Why would a loving God let this happen?
- (Does he care?)
- Did we do something wrong to deserve this?
- Where is Kim now – and will we truly be together again?
- How can I possibly go on without her?
- (What do I even want to do as I try to cope with this loss?)
- What does God want from me?
- (How can I partner with Him for now and for what's next?)

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- These were just some of the questions I have been wrestling with.
- I have more – and I’m not done.

I. CONTEXT & APPROACH FOR THIS SPIRITUAL “PE²P³ TALK”

- Although shaken, with the help of grief counseling, amazing family and friends, as well as other support (including Cornerstone, my workplace), I believe I am doing relatively “OK” (most days) but this journey will continue to be hard.
- I hope this “PE²P³ Talk” sharing and approach helps those of you who are also facing pain and grief in your life and encourage you to consider your own spiritual PERSPECTIVES, ENGAGEMENT, and EXPECTATIONS - and find some comfort and JOY as you PURSUE, PERSEVERE, AND PRAY.
- This Framework has helped me; however, it is also oversimplified, incomplete, and not exhaustive.
- More refinements may be needed to make it applicable and helpful for others.



- I did not set out with this PEP Framework in mind.
- Rather, it emerged as I wrestled with my Big Questions and trying to sort out how to share about my grief journey (including Love, Loss, and God).
- I knew it would help to share about my journey to reexamine my spiritual perspectives and how I knew I have to persevere and pray, but my wrestling with whether I would engage with God (and others) and my expectations of God (and His expectations of me) were also very important.
- The dynamics of this framework and the graphic are important:
 - The areas of focus are like “Russian Nesting dolls” (1 fits in and includes the next)
 - However, these parts also overlap and affect and change each other.
 - (For example, as I learn to pursue, persevere, and pray daily, it helps go back and change my Perspectives, Engagement, and Expectations ...)

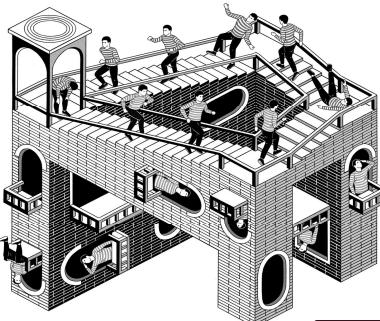
I. SHARING SOME OF MY “HIGH-LEVEL” INTERIM ANSWERS

Some of the Big Questions I Have Wrestled With	Some of the best answers I have so far – (but to be continued ...)
• How could this happen to us?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is part of being in a fallen world; we are not shielded from pain and suffering. • Cancer is more prevalent than I realized and was not part of God's good creation.
• Does the God that I thought I knew really exist?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, the “evidence”, revelation from the Bible, and our life experiences re-confirm that God does exist – even if I don't like His ways sometimes.
• Why would a loving God let this happen? • (Does he care?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, His story of creation and salvation have convinced me that He loves us. • God (in all 3 Persons as Father, Son, and Spirit) have suffered more for us but will redeem us and there will ultimately be no more suffering and only eternal Joy.
• Did we do something wrong to deserve this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. While God will ultimately judge the world and each person according to their faith, the gospel story of Jesus shows us that God wants to save us from sin and death. Jesus taught that suffering is not necessarily from the victim's sin.
• Where is Kim now – and will we truly be together again?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kim remained faithful as a Christian and is with Jesus in “paradise” through the power of the Holy Spirit – and will ultimately be a New Creation in the New Heaven and Earth after Jesus 2nd coming. If I remain faithful, I will join her.
• How can I possibly go on without her? • (What do I even want to do?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only by the grace of God and remaining a disciple of Jesus my savior and Lord. • Only in community with my family and others – seeking to be authentic and present. • To honor the promises I have made to God and Kim – with others' help, too.
• What does God want from me? • How can I partner with Him for now and for what's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To persevere and move forward with the pain and increased depth of experience. • To embrace His Word and Spirit, remaining grateful, spiritual aware, living out Shema love, repenting of my sins, and pursuing the love, power, and gifts of the Holy Spirit – while focusing on JOY and being here for my kids, grandkids, and others.

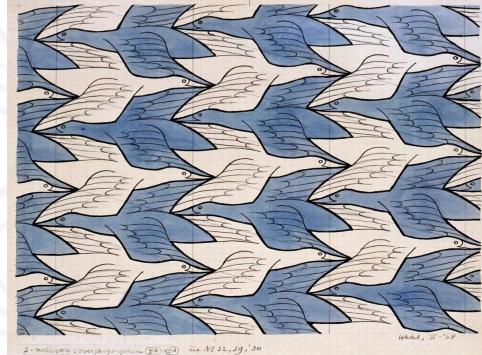
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- I know you can't read these interim answers I summarized to my Big Questions for now – so I will take time to go over each one of the main points I wanted to share.

II. PERSPECTIVES – STARTING WITH SOME BASICS



M.C. Escher artwork



- I and others have been taught to rely on our “5 senses” (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste).
- But this list is incomplete; it does not include > others (e.g., pain, temperature, hunger, fullness, thirst, itching, pressure, tension, stretch, magnetoreception, kinesthesia (movement), balance, proprioception (body position), temperature, chemoreception, intuition / “6th sense, love, aesthetics, etc.).
- **Even with just our physical senses, the existence and power of a creator God seems inescapable to me.**
- **Bigger challenges include questioning the loving God of the Bible – to deepen my faith and help with my grief.**

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- I had to start over with the basics – and with my spiritual whiplash and disorientation, understood that I had to be careful with what I would accept from my way of “sensing things.”
- That said, even from what I could sense, I could not deny God’s existence – even if I was pissed at Him and did not like his answers on Kim’s illness and death.

II. PERSPECTIVES – EXPANDING VIEWS OF THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

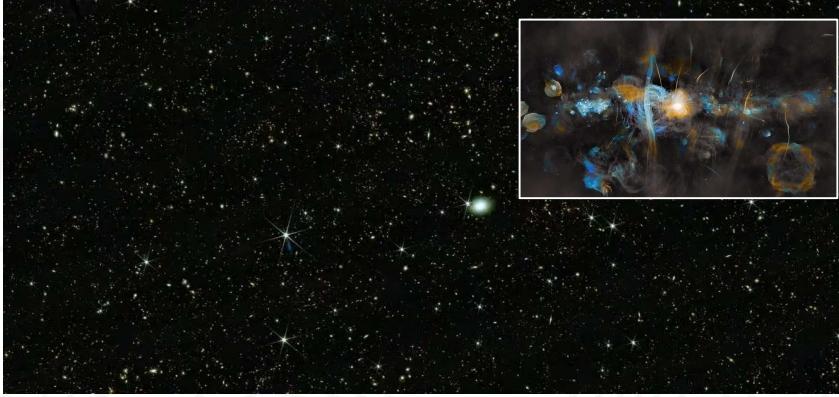
I have already studied and still accept many “proofs” (e.g., Cosmological, Teleological, Moral, Consciousness, Ontological arguments) for the existence of an everlasting, creator God before time, matter, space, and energy – and those “facts” endure.

Genesis 1:1
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 19:1
For the director of music. A psalm of David.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Using the NIV Bible translation throughout



Romans 1:8
For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

- 2023+ image from the *James Webb Space Telescope* – (est. 13.5 Billion Years ago (est. 98% Cosmic time); >800,000 galaxies; NASA predicts 1 septillion or 10^{24} stars in the Universe).
- Increasing discoveries of “black holes” and other evidence for a singular event origin event.

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- There are so many more levels of evidence for at least a Creator God that I can't share today.
- At a minimum scientists began thinking about 4 critical parameters for the Universe to exist (Gravity, Electromagnetic force, strong and weak nuclear forces).
- Now, most astrophysicists will list anywhere from 50 to over 200 critical conditions.
- Roger Penrose has calculated the odds at 1 to 10^{10} raised to the 1230 power.
- The critical conditions had to be aligned perfectly within 1 millionth of a second after the Big Bang.
- (Another great description: the chances for us to have a sustainable Universe is like: “flipping a coin and it coming up heads 10 Quintillion times in a row.”
- There has not been enough time in the estimated 13.5 billion years since the Big Bang.

II. PERSPECTIVES – EXPANDING VIEWS OF THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

The complexities of the known universe and origin of life have led an increasing number of atheist and agnostic scientists and others to become Deists (accepting the existence of an intelligent Creator) – but that's not belief or faith as a Theist (belief in a personal, loving God).

Genesis 1:26

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”



Psalm 139:

¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

- AI generated images for double-helix DNA and illustration of the principles of quantum physics.
- The Human Genome Project revealed 4 key chemicals with extensive, intricate coding: >3 Billion base pairs.
- Quantum physics focuses on the behavior of matter and energy at the smallest scales including potential multi-dimensions, as well as wave-particle duality, uncertainty principles, and quantum entanglement.

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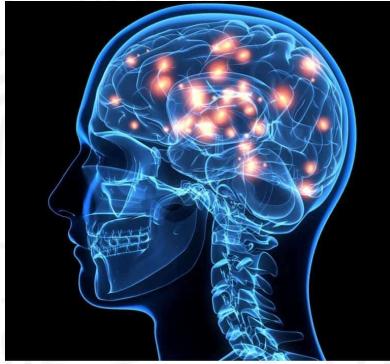
- In addition to the critical conditions to have our Universe, the further chances to have sustainable life on Earth are also unfathomable.
- Some of the further key requirements include: (1) the Earth's distance from the sun; (2) our protective atmosphere; (3) a planet with an abundance of water; (4) our dynamic magnetic field; (5) being in a solar system that shields; (6) having a stable sun as a star that is metal rich; (7) the further help from Jupiter and Saturn to shield us from asteroids, etc.; (8) a perfect moon to help stabilize our climates; and (9) our geothermal plate tectonics.
- Lee Smolin estimates that the chances of the conditions to be perfectly aligned for a life compatible earth would be 1 in 10 raised to the 229th power – and this is on top of the other conditions for the Universe to exist.
- These further evidences help me to accept that all this requires Intelligent Design and a purpose for Creation.

II. PERSPECTIVES – APPRECIATING OUR COMPLEXITY AND LIMITS

I “get it” that the study of our brains and other complexities of consciousness further support God’s role in our creation – but there are so many mysteries as to what “being made in His image” means and how to accept the limits of our understanding.

Isaiah 40:
13 Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD, or instruct the LORD as his counselor?

Isaiah 40:
28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.



Isaiah 55:
8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. 9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

- Our brains (weighing about 3 pounds) are the most complex organ in our bodies, responsible for controlling thoughts, emotions, movements and bodily functions.
- Our brain is the center of our nervous system; comprised of approximately 100 billion neurons; communicating through trillions of connections. [NIH Brain Basics Fact Sheet].

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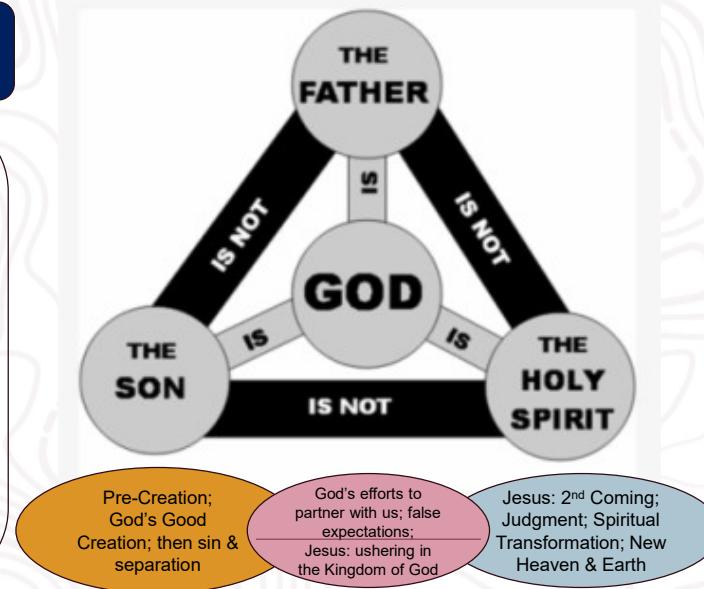
- These mysteries are beyond me.
- We have only begun to understand these intricacies (physically and experientially)
- They just add to our need to accept that at a minimum there is an Intelligent Designer God at the root of our universe and the creation of life.

II. EXPANDING MY VIEW OF THE TRINITY OF GOD

Our study of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity has helped me to better grasp "God", His love story for us, and to accept that His ways are not my own.

- "God" exists as three Persons: Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.
- All 3 share the same divine essence yet remain One God, not three gods.
- Each Person is fully God, co-equal, and co-eternal.
- They act in perfect unity and consistency while maintaining distinct roles in creation, redemption, and empowerment in our lives. [The Bible Hub]. (**Genesis 1-2+**)
- He has given us a good creation that we have damaged through our rebellion and sin. (**Genesis 3+** - God allowed choice).
- Through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, He will redeem Christians for eternity – in a New Heaven & Earth to come.

Does the God that I thought I knew really exist?
Why would a loving God let this happen? Does He care?
Where is Kim now? Will be together again?



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- So, I am left with a conclusion that (as Frank Turek and others have summarized), the evidence supports that there is a Creator that is (1) spaceless; (2) timeless; (3) immaterial; (4) powerful; (5) personal; and (6) intelligent.
- And the Bible points us to a theistic view of a God that has these attributes – and describes himself as "I AM" existence and tectonics "LOVE".
- (I don't have time to review the evidence that I was also reminded of about the truths supported in the Bible and even historical evidence for the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; but even so, I wanted to understand why God would make a universe with such pain and evil).
- Our study of the Trinity amazed me: for God to be Love, He needed the relationships between the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- I so appreciate Steve Newell's lesson on the way the Holy Spirit connects the Father and Son in Love. (God's personal presence; bring His Love, support, & guidance now).
- I am also blown away that God allowed for choice and even rebellion in the way He made us (and other spiritual beings) – and we chose to make God in our own image and try to pursue our will and sin – rather than His.
- This led to our not being in the Good world He created as a fallen world emerged.
- The Fall had consequences for not just us but all creation (e.g., cancer was not part of God's good creation).
- But God's love meant He would send Jesus to do for us what we could not do for ourselves – and His Plan of Salvation and restoration (New Heaven and New Earth).
- Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of Heaven (depicted in the middle of the graphic on the bottom of the slide) and those that die now (like Kim) can be with Him in "paradise" but she received the Holy Spirit and will be with God forever in the New Creation.
- If I remain faithful, I will be with her and God forever, as well.

II. EXPANDING MY VIEW OF THE TRINITY OF GOD

- For me, while the scriptures add to a compelling argument for a loving God (who does love us and wants us to thrive), there is so much in the mysteries of the Trinity of God that I don't understand and can't fully grasp.
- There are many descriptions and the following is just one that has helped me.

Father	Son	Holy Spirit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creator Sustainer Planner <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: -20px;">  </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revealer (Immanuel) Redeemer Mediator <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: -20px;">  </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helper Comforter & Guide Advocate <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: -20px;">  </div>

Example references for all 3 Persons of God	Example references for all 3 Persons of God
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> before creation and participated in the creation. Genesis 1:2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> referenced in descriptions of Jesus' being empowered by the Spirit. Acts 2:33; Acts 10:38; Romans 1:4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sovereign Lord to be sent with the Spirit. Isaiah 48:15. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> referenced when we are given the opportunity to be sons of the Father. Galatians 4:6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at Jesus' baptism. Mathew 3:16-17; Luke 3:22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all referenced as we may receive gifts of the spirit and access to God. Ephesians 1:17; Ephesians 2:22
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when Jesus cast out demons. Mathew 12:28 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Father poured the Spirit on us through Jesus. Titus 3:6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when Jesus said the Father was sending out the Spirit in Jesus' name. John 14:26; and as a Helper. John 15:26. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As we are saved by all three. 1 Peter 1:2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when Jesus commanded his followers to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Mathew 28:19 	

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- I appreciate our better understanding of how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed forever and help us.
- In my grief, I am so in need of the Holy Spirit to be my Helper, Comforter, Guide, and Advocate.

II. PERSPECTIVES – GOD'S LOVE STORY & THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- Our studies have enhanced my perspectives of God's Love Story as a whole, but also the extensive roles that the Holy Spirit has played, and why Jesus said it is better for us that the Spirit is with us now.

Key Illustrations of the Role of the Holy Spirit	Key Illustrations of the Role of the Holy Spirit
• Pre-creation: The Spirit hovered above the chaos	• The Spirit impregnates Mary with Jesus.
• Creation: God spoke and his Spirit (Ruach) helped bring all of creation into existence	• The Spirit protects Jesus from Herod's plans to kill him and helps him grow in wisdom and Spirit.
• God's Spirit breath (Ruach) also led to the creation of man and woman in His own image.	• The Spirit anoints Jesus at His baptism with the Father's love and command to listen to Him.
• God's Spirit empowered men with gifts to advance His temple.	• The Spirit empowers Jesus to perform miracles and speak with wisdom and power.
• God's Spirit was found in the temple.	• The Spirit helped Jesus endure temptations, face the cross, and to be resurrected and to ascend to the Father.
• The Spirit guided many of the patriarchs and prophets.	• The Father and Jesus sent out the Spirit to be the comforter, advocate, and helper for Jesus' followers.
• The Spirit convicts the world of sin and groans for the will of God to be fulfilled.	• The Spirit plays > 30 roles in the church and our lives - and will ultimately help usher in Jesus' 2 nd coming and the New Heaven & New Earth – where the faithful will be transformed and participate in this eternal life with God.

For additional scripture references and other details, please see [Appendix A: Seeking Greater Understanding of the Holy Spirit](#).

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- Studying the attributes of the Holy Spirit and his being able to be with all of us (even more than Jesus just physically being with some) helps me understand why Jesus said it is better that I go and you receive the Holy Spirit.
- Thanks again to Lish and Fenton for their great summary of 30+ attributes and actions of the Holy Spirit (which I have included in an appendix to this deck).

III. ENGAGEMENT & EXPECTATIONS (FOR COMPASSION)

- God's love story shows how engaged and invested in us He is.
- I needed to refocus on God's enduring heart of compassion to be personally comforted in my grief.

God's Heart of Compassion – some OT examples

- For the director of music. A psalm of David. ¹ Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble. **Psalms 41:1**
- ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. **Psalms 103:8-9**
- ⁵ The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. **Psalms 116:5**
- ⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. **Psalms 145:8**
- ¹⁵ "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. **Isaiah 49:15-16**
- ¹⁰ Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you. **Isaiah 54:10**
- ²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. **Lamentations 3:22-23**
- ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. **Micah 7:19**
- ⁹ "This is what the LORD Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.' **Zechariah 7:9-10**

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- So, I am left with MY expectations of God.
- If he creates a world that allows this pain and suffering, I need Him to provide comfort and more sense of all of this.
- God has been so patient in trying to partner with us – and we continue to disappoint (even David and others who were said to be "a man after God's own heart").
- And He wants us to know He does Love us and wants to comfort us as we turn our hearts and trust back to Him.

III. ENGAGEMENT & EXPECTATIONS (FOR COMPASSION)

God's Heart of Compassion – additional NT examples

- Jesus' caring for the disenfranchised and outcasts – including sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, Gentiles, poor, promiscuous women, even his own unschooled and ordinary first disciples, as well as many others.
- Jesus' healing and caring for the poor and needy (including touching the leper to heal him (**Mark 1:40-41**); curing a demoniac (**Mark 5:1-20**); commanding the faith of the Centurian and healing his servant (**Luke 7:1-10**); and the woman with blood issues (**Matthew 9:20-22**), and many others).
- Jesus rebuked religious leaders for challenging his healing, admonishing them that God desires mercy, not sacrifice (**Matthew 9:13**).
- Jesus' parables to focus on compassion, mercy, and forgiveness – over rules and "sacrifice" - including parables of The Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**); the Master commanding those who took care of "the least of these" (**Matthew 25:40-45**); the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11-32**); the Unforgiving Servant (**Matthew 18:21-35**); The Two Debtors (**Luke 7:41-43**); and the Banquet for the poor (**Luke 14:13-14**).
- **Jesus weeping for Lazarus (John 11:1-44); and for Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-38).**
- Jesus looking out for the needs of others while being crucified, including asking God to forgive his enemies (**Luke 23:34**); accepting the thief's request to join him in His Kingdom (**Luke 23:43**); asking John to take care of Mary now as his mother (**John 19:26**).
- **Jesus teaches in John 9:2-3 that neither the blind man nor his parents sinned, but that God could work good from his condition.**
- **¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. **Hebrews 4:15****
- **And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. **Romans 5:2-5****

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- I found most of my comfort but focusing on God's love story of the gospel.
- Jesus says I can understand the Father by watching who He is and how He lived.
- So, I found further help by seeing the Love Jesus lived out (even before dying for our sins and providing an opportunity to become saved forever).

IV. CALLS TO PURSUE AND PERSEVERE

- Even though I have not liked a lot of His answers, I accept that God has called me to pursue Him and persevere.

Calls to Pursue God	Calls to Persevere
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus confirms The Shema as The Greatest Commandment: ... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all of your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself. Luke 10:27 ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6 ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:6 ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:33-34 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33 ²³ Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Luke 9:23-25 ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. John 15:4 ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9 ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11-13

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- While I don't fully understand why God created the Universe and Us that knew we would rebel and still wants to rescue us, I am grateful for it.
- Through our study of the Trinity, I accept that God wants us to Love Him back, so I had to consider God's expectations of me, too.
- I accept that I need to love God back (obeying Shema) and (reluctantly) accepting that we are not shielded from pain, suffering, and death of loved ones ... but are promised that God will rescue us in this life (and the life to come).
- Even recently, I appreciate better the call to persevere and grow from Romans 5:2-5 (Boasting in the Hope of the Glory of God, and accepting, "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character, and character hope."

IV. CALLS TO PRAY & PARTNER WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

- Sometimes, the best I can do is to take things daily – and to pursue, persevere, and pray for God to comfort me now and guide me as to how He wants me to move forward.
- Jesus teaches us a sincere, authentic way to share our hearts in prayer to God.

Jesus Taught His Disciples How to Pray	NIV References
<p>⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.</p>	• Mathew 6:5-8
<p>⁹“This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.</p>	• Mathew 6: 9-13
<p>¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.</p>	• Mathew 6: 14-15

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- Many days for me, its just all I can do to put one foot in front of the other – and praying helps me the most.
- Examining how Jesus maintained His own closeness to the Father through prayer has helped to center me.
- Beyond the Shema prayer (and Greatest Commandment), Jesus taught us how to approach God ... but this “Lord’s Prayer” has become too rote, and its too familiar” – and I need the authentic, powerful connections that Jesus modeled in prayer.

IV. CALLS TO PRAY & PARTNER WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

- Tim Mackie (co-founder of the Bible Project) provided a very helpful lesson for me from the book of Matthew in January of 2015 about the [alignment of the Lord's prayer and the Shema](#) - which is posted on YouTube.

Mathew 6:9-13 (NIV) verses:	Tim Mackie Observations
⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:	Jesus provides a literal example to focus on loving the one true God and others.
"“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Father ("Abba") can be approached directly by all of his children We can enjoy a close, personal relationship
¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first half includes 3 hopes for how we approach the Father. Jesus saw how God's name/reputation had been tarnished; should be holy. Focuses on the story of Heaven coming back in reconciliation with Earth – begun as Jesus lives, dies, and is resurrected Focuses us on our need to surrender our will to God's and help reflect Him on this earth – in preparation for the ultimate New Heaven and New Earth.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The second half includes 3 requests for "us" (as a community) to rely on God Adopt a mindset to trust God for daily manna, leads to generosity for others
¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing daily on how we are loved and forgiven by God, should lead us to do this for others; stop the expectation that it is our right to seek retaliation.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can expect testing and temptation – but it is OK to ask God to take away these challenges and trust He can/will deliver us from evil and harm.

18

- One of the blessings that occurred recently, has been finding an amazing lesson Tim Macke gave – showing how fresh, authentic, and re-enforcement of the Shema that Jesus commanded is in this “Lord’s Prayer”.
- I strongly recommend that everyone go back and listen to Tim’s lesson – and to further commit to daily prayer in this authentic way.

IV. CALLS TO PRAY & PARTNER WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

- I see my need to invite and partner with the Holy Spirit as an Advocate, Counselor, and Comforter (including in prayer) more than ever – particularly through my grief and into the next chapters that God will call me to.

The power of the Holy Spirit in our prayer	The power of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual battles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." Romans 8:26-27 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:10-17
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." Ephesians 1:17-18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Ephesians 6:18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. 	

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- Our study of the Holy Spirit (and reminder of how He even helps me when I don't know what or how to pray) has been so comforting.
- I KNOW the Holy Spirit has been with Kim, me, and our family during this last year (including her illness, her passing, and since).
- All of this has helped me to have hope and continue to search for Joy in God's promises.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS & REFLECTIONS

▪ **In summary, I am:**

- Largely living with more gratitude than frustration – and believe that Kim is with the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Putting one foot in front of the other most days.
- (Like Peter, I have concluded, “Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life.” **John 6:68** (NIV).
- Learning to live with “YES, AND ...” regarding the blessings I’ve been given and pain that endures.
- Committed to remain focused on these “PEP” approaches, focusing on how to find JOY and express thankfulness for all that God has blessed me with, including what Kim and I shared for 40 years.
- Learning to be OK with allowing things to happen organically and able to say “I don’t know” - for now.
- Trusting that God will reveal how He wants me to live out Shema and serve my family, Cornerstone, and others.

▪ **And ... please reflect for yourselves:**

- What enhanced “PE²P³” understandings of God, if any, have you gained during this last year?
- What enhanced commitments to Jesus’ Greatest Commandments (in partnership with The Holy Spirit) are you prepared to make moving forward?
- What spiritual relationships and practices will you invite to help you persevere and even grow when pain, suffering, and grief do occur on your journey?
- Will you commit to daily prayer – imitating Jesus’ approach – to get you through the balance of the holidays?

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- I don’t have time to share so many other scriptures about God’s promises for comfort and Joy, even in pain and suffering, but I hope to expand this material to include even more scriptures to help others.
- Psalm 16:11 (“You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at our right hand.”)
- Psalm 126:5 (“Those that sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.”)
- John 16:22 (“So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”)
- Again, I hope this sharing will help you – now or as you experience other pain, suffering, and grief – and helps you to find your faith, trust, and hope if the loving God we find revealed in the Bible and particularly through Jesus, our Lord and Savior – including the help of the Holy Spirit.

**MY 2025 YEAR-IN-REVIEW:
SHARING A SPIRITUAL “PE²P³” TALK**

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SEEKING GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- The following is an expanded overview of several key roles of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (Copilot summary)

The Holy Spirit - Key Roles in Our Lives

- **Comforter and Guide:** Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide believers into all truth (**John 16:13**). He helps Christians understand God's will and provides comfort during difficult times.
- **Conviction of Sin:** One of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to convict individuals of their sin, righteousness, and judgment (**John 16:8**). This conviction leads to repentance and a deeper understanding of one's need for salvation.
- **Indwelling Presence:** Upon accepting Christ, believers receive the Holy Spirit, who takes up residence in their hearts (**Romans 8:9**). This indwelling presence assures them of their salvation and sonship in God's family.
- **Empowerment for Service:** The Holy Spirit empowers believers to live out their faith and fulfill their God-given purposes. He provides spiritual gifts (**1 Corinthians 12**) that enable Christians to serve the church and the world effectively.
- **Sanctification:** The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the process of sanctification, helping believers grow in holiness and produce the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**).
- **Intercession:** The Holy Spirit intercedes for believers, praying on their behalf when they do not know what to pray (**Romans 8:26**). This intercessory role highlights the Spirit's intimate connection with the believer's spiritual life.

APPENDIX A: SEEKING GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- The following summary was presented by **Lish Blain** and **Fenton Gardner** on January 8, 2025, and identifies additional ways that the Holy Spirit works actively in our lives and the church to accomplish God's purposes.

Role & Action of the Holy Spirit	Scripture References
1. Is the power behind all spiritual success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zechariah 4:6 – “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty.
2. Was poured out and empowers God’s people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 2:17 – “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”
3. Intercedes for us in prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romans 8:26-27 – “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”
4. Guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John 16:13 (NIV) – “But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you in all truth.”
5. Comforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John 14:26 (KJV) - “But the Comforter, which is Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.”
6. Convicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John 16:8 (NIV) – “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”
7. Empowers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 1:8 (NIV) – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

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Role & Action of the Holy Spirit	Scripture References
8. Teaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John 14:26 (NIV) – “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things.”
9. Intercedes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romans 8:26 (NIV) – “The Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”
10. Sanctifies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Peter 1:2 (NIV) – “Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.”
11. Inspires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Peter 1:21 (NIV) – “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
12. Strengthens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ephesians 3:16 (KJV) – “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.”
13. Transforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV) – “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit.”
14. Leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romans 8:14 (NIV) – “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”

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Role & Action of the Holy Spirit	Scripture References
15. Counsels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isaiah 11:2 (NIV) – “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might.”
16. Reminds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John 14:26 (NIV) – “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”
17. Seals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ephesians 1:13 (NIV) – “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”
18. Fills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 4:31 (NIV) – “And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”
19. Anoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luke 4:18 (NIV) – “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”
20. Reveals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Corinthians 2:10 (NIV) – “These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.”
21. Testifies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romans 8:16 (NIV) – “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

APPENDIX A: SEEKING GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Role & Action of the Holy Spirit	Scripture References
22. Discerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Corinthians 12:10 (NIV) – “To another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing spirits.”
23. Liberates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV) – “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”
24. Enlightens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ephesians 1:17-18 (NIV) – “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.”
25. Quickens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romans 8:11 (KJV) – “But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”
26. Purifies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Titus 3:5 (NIV) – “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”
27. Unites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ephesians 4:3 (NIV) – “Make every effort to keep unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”
28. Manifests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV) – “Now to each one of the manifestations of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

APPENDIX A: SEEKING GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Role & Action of the Holy Spirit	Scripture References
29. Adopts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romans 8:15 (NIV) – “¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “<i>Abba, Father.</i>”
30. Heals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 10:38 (NIV) – “³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”
31. Gives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Corinthians 12:11 – “¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”
32. Speaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 13:2 (NIV) – “² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- Our Bible study and discussions in 2025 further confirm to me that Cornerstone has been on the right path to clarify our “Core Beliefs” and assess our Practices to align with the heart and priorities of Jesus.
- A summary of these statements are set forth below.
- We want to be a healthy body of believers who worship God and obey the Greatest Commandment (as confirmed by Jesus):

Keeping a Godly Focus & Commitment

Extended Families & Friends
(including “Big Church” and “Small Church” Members)

Children – Young & Adult
Parents
Individuals

Broader Communities & Relationships

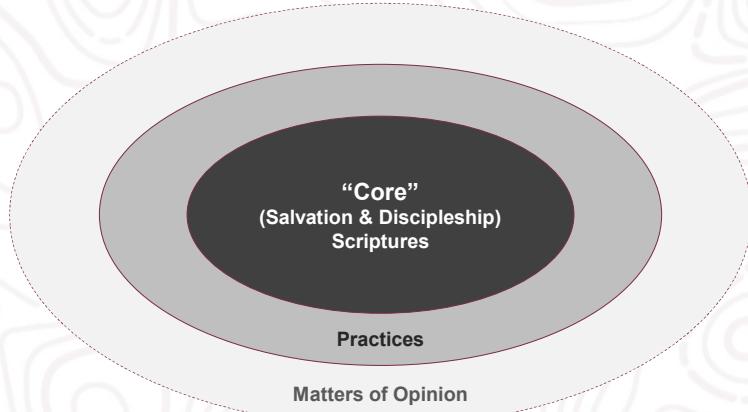
The Greatest Commandment

... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all of your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself.

Luke 10:27 NIV

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- Our Bible study and discussions have helped me to also re-confirm our “Core Beliefs” statements.
- We want to be a healthy church, with focus on Salvation and Discipleship issues, supportive practices, and respect for varying opinions in how we seek to fulfill the Greatest Commandment.



APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- Our Bible study and discussions have helped me to also re-confirm our “Core Beliefs” statements.
- **At Cornerstone, we seek to teach about “core” Salvation and Discipleship scriptures by examining scriptures focused on the call to unity set forth in Ephesians 4:**

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One God

God, the Father, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, is good and keeps his promises. He is YHWH, the great I AM and the Ancient of Days. Often referred to as the Holy Trinity, we believe in the Three-In-One: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One Lord

Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus, the Messiah, is the risen, reigning, and returning King. He is the eternal Word of God who became flesh and lived among us, fully human and fully divine. He was crucified, died, was buried, and was resurrected on the third day. He is reigning on the throne and will return to judge the living and the dead.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One Spirit

God's Holy Spirit fills every Christian and unites us in one body; our Teacher and Counselor who gives us wisdom, discernment, and conviction of sin; our Comforter, Intercessor and Advocate before God's throne; our Seal and Deposit, who guarantees our glorious inheritance.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One Faith

We believe the Bible to be inspired by God, a reliable witness to the story of God's people through the ages, and authoritative for our life and teaching. Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ. We view the Scriptures as the primary instrument for introducing God's story and message to the world – the Good News of the Kingdom.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One Baptism

Salvation begins and ends with God – it is God’s work and it is accomplished by God’s grace, love, kindness and mercy (Titus 3:3-8). God alone saves, but we are free to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation. The biblical response to God’s offer of salvation involves faith (Acts 16:31-34), repentance (Acts 2:36-39), and baptism (Acts 8:35-39). As we see in the many conversion narratives in the book of Acts, God meets the convert in faith, repentance, and baptism and the result is salvation (receiving the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit). Although believing, repenting, and being immersed are things we do, they are not works that in any way earn salvation. They are simply the appropriate biblical response to accept God’s gracious offer.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One Body

The biblical word for church means “congregation, assembly.” We are a Christian community that gathers to worship and to learn to put the teachings of Jesus into practice. We are a “called out” people – called out from death to life, from darkness to light, and from captivity to freedom. We are the family of God, the body of Christ, citizens of the Kingdom of God.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

(Ephesians 4:3-6)

We Believe In One Hope

Jesus came to give us abundant, authentic and eternal life. This eternal kind of life is the life of the age to come, when God's Kingdom fully comes and God's will is done on the new earth as it is in the heavens. But that eternal kind of life begins now, as we experience it in some measure through the Holy Spirit, through our relationships with God and each other, and as we see the Kingdom break in on this world as God's will is put into practice. We believe in the Great Resurrection in that age to come, when God will live with us and we will reign with God.