

Experiencing God's promises

Part 1 - "Ask anything in my name"

This is a follow-up to the sermon, "Is the Bible really God's word?" because one huge reason for believing the Bible is God's word is experiencing its promises. And it's among those promises we find this staggering statement from Jesus in **John 14:14** - "[You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.](#)"

Jesus repeats the promise several times too, in:

John 15:7 - "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

John 16:23-24 - "my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

Matthew 7:7-8 - "Ask and it will be given to you...For everyone who asks receives."

Matthew 18:19 - "if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."

Matthew 21:22 - "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Mark 11:24 - "whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

There's power in the promise, too, **Matthew 21:21** - "if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree (*see verses 19-20*), but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done (*see Mark 11:23 and Luke 17:6, too*)." And **Mark 9:23** - "[Everything is possible for him who believes,](#)" which brings us to the two great "Therefore's" -

"**Therefore**, since we have a high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess...Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (**Hebrews 4:14, 16**)" - and -

"**Therefore** he is able to [save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them](#) (**Hebrews 7:25**)."

So this is the power behind the promise too, it's "Christ Jesus, who died - (and more than that, who was raised to life - (who is now) at the right hand of God and is [also interceding for us](#) (**Romans 8:34**)." "What then, shall we say in response to this?" Paul asks. "If God is for us, who can be against us? (**verse 31**)" With God for us, there is nothing we can't do. So when Jesus says, "[Ask and it will be](#)

[given to you](#) (**Matthew 7:7**),” he can say that with an absolute guarantee because he’s the power that makes it happen.

How, then, do we set the promise in motion?

1) Believe:

In **John 14**, in the lead-up to the promise in verse 14, Jesus drops the vital clue. “[Believe me](#),” he says, **verse 11**. That’s the key.

He then says in **verse 12**, that “[anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these.](#)” Unfortunately, we humans have this awful tendency to not believe, even when faced with obvious miracles (**Mark 6:4-6**). You can sense Jesus’ frustration when he cries in **Mark 9:19**, “[O unbelieving generation, how long shall I put up with you?](#)”

In that same story, though, we have the solution. When Jesus tells a Dad who has a kid with convulsions that “[everything is possible for him who believes](#) (**verse 23**),” the Dad replies, **verse 24**, “[I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!](#)” That’s the solution. If we’re having trouble believing, then simply ask for belief (**verse 29**). We can ask for the belief to believe!

To set the promise in motion, then, we ask in belief - asking for the belief too, if we need help believing. What also helps our belief, point No. 2, is knowing what we ask for is within God’s will...

2) According to his will:

This is another amazing guarantee that sets John 14:14 in motion:

1 John 5:14-15 - “[This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.](#) And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him.”

1 John 3:21-22 - “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and [receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.](#)” “And this is his command,” John adds, in case we were wondering what commands Jesus is talking about, it’s “[to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us](#) (**verse 23**).” “Loving one another” is obvious, but what does “believing in his name” mean? Well, that’s in point No. 3, because Jesus’ name is powerful fuel for the fire, too...

3) In Jesus’ name:

There’s a wonderful example of the power of Jesus’ name in **Act 3**. It’s the story of the man crippled from birth, begging for money at one of the gates to the Temple. He asks Peter and John for money, and Peter replies, “[Silver or gold I](#)

do not have, but what I have I give you (verse 4).” And what did Peter have to give him? The power of Jesus’ name: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” Peter told the man, “walk.” And the man walked.

And what was the lesson to be learnt from this incident? **Verse 16** - “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him, that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.”

“Complete” healing, notice? When Peter called on Jesus’ name, it took care of the man’s need - completely. And this is what Jesus is offering. A prayer in his name is guaranteed to help people walk - in whatever crippling situation they’re in - as completely as the cripple walked. It carries the power to bring exactly what a person needs - in full. If we could only grasp the power and love that name carries: a prayer in his name is a guarantee that the needs of those we pray for, or for ourselves, are met - totally.

James certainly understand it this way, too, when he wrote in **James 5:15**, “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.” That kind of prayer, done by a righteous man, is “powerful and effective (verse 16).”

It would reach much, much further than just physical illness, too; it would “forgive sins (verse 15),” restore someone who’s wandered away from the truth (verse 19), “turn a sinner away from his error” and “save him from death and cover a multitude of sins (verse 20).”

When Jesus’ name is called on it’s a guarantee of complete healing in the areas that really count. And we can pray in total faith for that to happen because that’s what Jesus came for, to heal the sick, in every form of sickness we’re suffering from (**Luke 4:18**). He’s into “complete” healing, and a prayer of faith in his name - believing the power and the love that name carries - guarantees it.

Do we realize, then, point No. 4, the vast amount of things we can ask for?...

4) Realizing what we can ask for

Paul helps me understand what I can ask for in what he included in his prayers, like:

Colossians 1:9-12 - “Since the day we heard about you,” he writes, “we have not stopped praying about you and asking God to fill you with knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way (*which is jolly useful, 1 John 3:22*): bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious

might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father.” There’s also -

Ephesians 3:16-20 - “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church...”

For Paul to pray for these things, they must be within God’s will. They’re ours for the asking, then, too. And notice the words, “fill,” “every” and “all?” We can ask for full measures, just like Paul did.

And it was because Paul asked for these things, that he “learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

Paul could do “everything,” he said, which is exactly what Jesus promised in **Mark 9:23**. Whatever mountains we face in life, we can cast them into the sea, too! And there’s one more way of really getting these promises going for us, and that’s point No. 5...

5) Thanking God in advance

Remember **Mark 11:24** on page 1? - “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

“Have received it,” notice that? It’s past tense. It’s already ours as we’re asking! And believing it’s already ours, guarantees it’s ours, too! That’s how certain God’s promises are. But to ask, knowing what we ask for is already ours, is like thanking God in advance. It’s a way of expressing our belief and thanks at the same time. It’s like saying, “I know what I’m asking for is mine already, so thank you in advance for what I know you’ve already done.”

That’s why Paul says “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6),” because we can pray with thanksgiving, knowing our requests have already been taken care of, no matter what situation we’re in (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**).

In conclusion, then, we’re talking about an incredible promise from Jesus in John 14:14, that we can ask anything in his name and he will do it. We know how to set that promise in motion, too, from several clues in scripture, mentioned above.

So what's happening if that promise isn't happening in our lives?

The Bible gives us a couple of clues, in **James 4:2-3** - "You do not have, because you do not ask God," first of all, and secondly, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

Two very useful clues: 1) If we don't ask, we won't receive, and 2) We won't receive if we ask for the wrong reasons - both of which sound reasonable, because why would God give us something if we don't want it, or we want it for purely selfish reasons? - and especially when we could've asked for anything in Jesus' name instead, and got it.

A story I remember reading somewhere finishes this off nicely for me, because it includes what's possible and how we mess it up. It went something like this:

A Dad and his son go to a grocery store every day to buy the healthiest food they can afford for the family. They do this so regularly together they become a familiar routine for the store manager.

One day, Dad can't make it to the store, so he sends his son saying, "Just use my name and the store manager will give you everything you need, because he already knows what our needs are." So the boy goes to the store and says, "I'm putting in an order in my Dad's name for four of your biggest, fattest weiners."

The store manager looks at the boy and says, "Really? Well, first of all, I know your Dad didn't order wieners and secondly, you know I don't have them to sell anyway. And let me tell you something else, son. You're a fool. When you came in here and put in an order in your Dad's name, I would have given you anything you asked for. You could've ordered the entire store and I would've given it to you. So, why didn't you do that? Instead, you use your Dad's name to get what you want, and now you're going back with nothing."

And the moral of the story? **Colossians 2:3** - in Christ are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." That's what we can ask for and receive in full. The store's open just waiting for us to ask!

Part 2 - Grab all God has to offer

To recap Part 1, it's no problem to God if we ask for things, in fact he loves it, and if what we ask for is within his will, it's ours in full for simply believing and asking. And if we have trouble believing - well, that's not a problem either, because we can also ask God for help to believe.

We now face an open door into “[all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge](#),” realizing at the same time that God has made it possible for us to receive them all, **Mark 9:23** - “[Everything is possible for him who believes](#).”

Being a Christian, therefore, is a lot like being a child again at Christmas. A huge pile of gifts awaits us and they’re all ours to rip open and enjoy. And it’s fine with Jesus if we swoop down and grab all God has to offer, because it’s just such an attitude that enables us to enter his Kingdom. Thinking back to what it was like at Christmas as a child might not be a bad idea, then.

For some extraordinary reason, Christmas keeps going. It’s staying power is remarkable. Every year, even in a world that has little interest in Christ or Christianity, people put up lights, decorate a Christmas tree and wish each other a merry Christmas. It’s amazing how an ancient Christian festival hangs on in both custom and spirit.

But it’s not really amazing, is it? We know what keeps Christmas going. It’s children. For Christian and non-Christian alike it’s the response of children to receiving gifts. If it wasn’t for that, would Christmas still be around? “It’s for the kids,” people say. And who can deny the pleasure of giving to children? Children are a delight to give gifts to.

It’s a child’s response to gifts that keeps Santa Claus alive, too. Here comes Santa again, his sleigh piled to the brim with gifts for children, and the entire Christmas fantasy is played out in every home as always, with Santa coming down the chimney and placing gifts round the Christmas tree, and the children waking up 5:00 am, unable to contain themselves a minute longer, begging their parents for a chance to open what Santa’s brought them.

Ridiculous it all is, yes, but it’s captured something we Christians could learn from in our response to the gifts Jesus brought us. We have our Santa Claus as Christians, too, it’s Jesus Christ, and just like Santa Claus he has a pile of gifts for us, as well. And, what’s more, it’s fine with Jesus if we respond to his gifts just like children do to Santa Claus. In fact, he’d love us to, because this is what he came for, as we see in **Ephesians 4:8**.

Out of the blue, while writing to the Ephesians, Paul remembers a verse way back in **Psalms 68:18** about God taking care of all his people’s needs against all kinds of opposition and enemy attack, and the response of his people - and even of their enemies - back to him in return.

The verse goes like this: “[When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men even from the rebellious](#).”

Paul then takes that verse but makes one slight change to it. Here's how he phrases it in **Ephesians 4:8** - "When he (Christ, verse 7) ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

Not gifts from men, as in Psalm 68, but gifts to men.

Paul makes the change to explain what Christ ascended for. It was to give gifts to us, not receive them from us. Jesus is up there "on high" now as the great giver of gifts.

And so, by interesting coincidence, is Santa Claus. He's also "on high," in the North Pole, pictured as the great giver of gifts, too. But it's such a sham because Santa Claus doesn't have the power to give gifts. He's just a man, and an imaginary one at that, but here's Jesus Christ who really does have the power. When Jesus ascended to the Father, **Colossians 2:15**, he "disarmed" every power and authority in the entire universe, making a "public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

In other words, Jesus is on high over everything! He therefore does have the power to give gifts to men, unlike Santa Claus who's limited to one sleigh and one night to deliver gifts to every child in the world, which again, of course, is ridiculous and impossible - but not when it pictures Jesus Christ. When we see Jesus in the light of Ephesians 4:8, we realize there really is a Santa Claus: it's Jesus. There really is one on high giving gifts: it's him. But Jesus isn't limited to the North Pole, with only elves for helpers, he's above everything with all the power he needs to give us every gift he's got.

So here we are as Christians: we've actually got the Santa Claus the world can only dream of and imagine! All the delights of Christmas, then, are in reality ours. What people can only imagine at Christmas and try to create by fantasy figures and limited physical gifts, we can enjoy in full from the all-powerful Jesus. And it's not just on one day of the year, either, it's whenever.

We have a problem, though. We're adults. We don't respond to gifts like we did as children. And that's a great pity - as we see in Jesus' response to some budding Christians in **Luke 18:16-17**.

You'd think the adults in Luke 18 would have known better than to respond like they did. They'd seen Jesus in action, healing people of everything that ailed them, and all who asked for healing got it. As a result, people were flocking to him in their thousands, lining up wherever he stayed, racing to where they thought he was going, and searching him out if he went off for some quiet time.

And was Jesus upset by that? Far from it. He loved it! This is what he'd come for and hoped would happen. "Since that time (of John the Baptist), the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it

(**Luke 16:16**),” Jesus cried with gusto. If people wanted to storm the doors to God’s Kingdom to grab what it had to offer, it was just fine with him!

But then a day came in **Luke 18:16-17** when a group of Mothers came to him to get their children blessed, and his disciples turned them away.

Jesus could hardly believe his eyes! “[Let the little children come to me,](#)” he bellowed, “[do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.](#)”

What an amazing statement! Jesus had just handed people the key to the Kingdom of God. It was the attitude of a child.

Why a child? Because if a child was offered a gift the size of God’s Kingdom he’d be out of his seat like a shot to grab it and rip the paper off to see what he’s got. Children don’t hold back when it comes to gifts - and Jesus loved it! But he loved it any time people came to grab what he had to offer. Healing, casting out demons, blessings for children, you name it, he gave it gladly. And if the line-up was long, he stayed ‘til the last person’s need was met, just like Santa making sure every kid in the line-up gets a gift. Santa and Jesus are amazingly similar.

One wonders, though, why Jesus loved what might be considered a rather selfish, grasping attitude in people. Thousands were trekking the countryside purely for what they could get from him. But it didn’t bother him.

It doesn’t bother parents buying Christmas gifts for their kids either - even though the kids are only interested in what they can get, too. The parents couldn’t care less about that, though. All they see and look forward to is the delight in a child’s eyes when he opens up a gift and discovers what’s inside. That’s what keeps Christmas going: it’s giving to kids and seeing their response. It never fails to delight!

It never fails to delight Jesus, either. He never stopped giving all the time during his ministry here, even though he knew people were following him around simply for what they could get. It hasn’t stopped him giving ever since, either. He never tires of it. He loves blessing us, as does the Father, “[with every spiritual blessing \(Ephesians 1:3\).](#)”

Jesus loves giving, but what makes it all worthwhile is our response. It’s the same with parents at Christmas. It takes a lot of work finding the right gift, wrapping it up, hiding it effectively, and sneaking out at 2:00 am to put it under the tree. But the work and lost sleep are instantly swept out of memory in the delightful cries of a child who’s just opened the gift he was desperately hoping for!

It's the same with Jesus. It took enormous sacrifice on his part too, but to watch our delight as it dawns on us what his sacrifice has made available to us, makes it all worthwhile, over and over and over again. And the more like children we are in our response, the better. If we swoop on his gifts with the same ferocity as a child ripping open a gift, he's delighted! It's exactly what he hoped would happen! We're only grabbing what he meant us to have anyway.

So, when kids came to Jesus with their lovely kids' attitude, of simply accepting what he had to offer without hesitation, he was extremely pleased. But his pleasure turned to instant rage, however, when his disciples shooed the children away. Why? Because they were shooing away the very attitude that was the key to entering the Kingdom. Jesus was livid. And I think I got a glimpse of how Jesus felt in an incident involving a tarantula.

It was the March break from school and a local Mall had set up a demonstration by an expert on insects. I was slurping a coffee at the time, within range of the demonstration, so I was able to observe the reactions of the kids.

To demonstrate that tarantulas are harmless when handled normally, the expert took a tarantula out of its cage and rested it on his open palm. He then turned to the crowd and asked, "So, who would like to hang out with a tarantula?" - meaning, who would like to hold one?!

A child of about 5 sitting on his Dad's shoulders threw up his arm, just like that. The chance to hold a tarantula, wow, gimme, gimme!

It was just the response Jesus loved when demonstrating the Kingdom of God. He loved it when people saw what he had to offer and went for it, no hesitation.

Dad, however, immediately pulled the boy's arm down!

I could hardly believe my eyes. Why would a Dad deny his kid such an amazing experience? To actually hold a gigantic, hairy tarantula - well, the boy would never have forgotten it, he'd never stop telling stories at school about it, and probably never stop telling his grandchildren about it one day, either. It may have even kickstarted a lifelong interest in insects, leading to a star-studded career as a spider expert and venom-healer. Who knows? But we do know his Dad didn't let it happen.

I was livid. But then I began to wonder if I'm a bit like that Dad, too, because Jesus made a very similar demonstration. He told us what he came for, **Luke 4:18**. He then demonstrated it in power for 3½ years, rose to Heaven to make it all possible for us now, gave us the Spirit with all kinds of gifts, including Christ's own nature in us and a loving relationship with the Father - and what's my response? Do I get excited? Do I search out what gifts he has on offer and grab them for all their worth? Do I see Jesus delighting in my attitude when I act like a

kid at Christmas-time? Well, sometimes I do, maybe, but when was the last time I studied the Bible like a kid studies his Christmas presents, to figure out what he's got?!

But we're adults, for heaven's sake, we're not kids anymore, right? We're not into all that childish grabbing for gifts anymore.

We aren't?!

But Jesus told the crowd that anyone not receiving the Kingdom of God like a little child would never enter it. That sounds like full permission for us to be kids again and act like we did at Christmas. But we can, because the Father and Jesus want to give us every spiritual blessing possible, and Jesus has no problem with us storming the ramparts to get them! Clearly, he loves giving us gifts but he delights just as much in us shaking the Bible to find out what gifts it holds in store for us - just as parents get a kick out of watching a child shake a Christmas present! Kids aren't shy about checking out their gifts, and nor need we be.

Not only did Jesus give us an amazing promise in John 14:14, that we could ask anything in his name and he will do it, he also said we could ask boldly, as the King James says in **Hebrews 4:16**. The Message translation phrases it this way: "So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give." That captures the spirit of a child exactly.

We can go to Christ as brashly as a child who expects gifts at Christmas, because that's exactly the situation Jesus has put us in. He doesn't mind us acting like kids at all. In fact, he loves it. At least we recognize what he's been saying these last 2,000 years in **2 Peter 1:3** that "[His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.](#)" That's "everything," Peter said, just like Jesus said in **Mark 9:23**.

So, what Jesus was offering in his day hasn't changed. He is still the dispenser of "[great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires \(2 Peter 1:4\).](#)"

This is what Jesus came to offer, real power from God himself enabling us to know God and think like him, and real promises of instant and perfect help in every trouble, weakness, attitude or addiction that plagues us. There isn't anything in our lives that God's power and promises don't cover. And it's all a gift, too. We don't have to work for it, perform rituals to get it, or fulfill some sort of obligation in return.

That's why Jesus called the Kingdom of God "good news" and why, when people truly understood it, they weren't shy about grabbing all it had to offer. And it's fine

with Jesus if we come boldly to him to get what he's offering because we'll discover then, like Paul did, that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)."

Note how Paul said "all things," and Peter said "everything?" So did Jesus in **Mark 9:23**, because that's the gift he offers us. It's the chance to enter his amazing Kingdom and experience all its treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And all he asks of us is to grab those treasures like a child would and they're ours for the taking!

Part 3 - The promise of the Spirit

To recap Part 2, it's not a problem for God if we treat his gifts like a child treats Christmas presents. Jesus loved it when Mothers came to him with their children to get a blessing from him. "The Kingdom belongs to such as these!" he cried, talking of the attitude of children who saw him much like children see Santa Claus today.

But Jesus is Santa Claus! "When he (Jesus) ascended on high," **Ephesians 4:8**, he "gave gifts to men." Jesus became the great dispenser of gifts, the real Santa Claus on high, with a treasure chest full of "wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3)." And the key to opening the chest is to open it as a child would, with eagerness to see what's inside!

Jesus got great pleasure out of people eagerly seeking what he had to offer. Like the four men in **Mark 2:3-5** who couldn't get their paralyzed friend to Jesus because of the crowd pressed around him, so they went up on the roof, ripped some tiles off and lowered him down to Jesus that way! Jesus' reaction? "Son, your sins are forgiven." Not just a healing, but all his sins forgiven as well. Jesus clearly loved it when people stormed the ramparts to get what he had to offer (**Luke 16:16**).

And Paul told the church twice to "eagerly desire" the gifts God was offering - in **1 Corinthians 12:31** and **14:1**. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," the King James says in 12:31. You mean, it's actually legal to covet? When it comes to God's gifts, yes, it is; we can swoop on them like a child does his Christmas presents! And we can go for the "best" gifts, too!

So what are the best gifts? Well, there's one gift far above them all, and it's so important that Jesus gave it to his disciples before he ascended.

The first hint Jesus drops in public about this wonderful gift is in **Luke 11:13**. "If you (fathers) then, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus says this in the context of **verses 9-10**, “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find...For everyone who asks receives, etc.,” and for his first example of what they can ask for, it’s the Holy Spirit. And, what’s more, if they ask for the Holy Spirit, they are guaranteed to receive it from the Father himself. He loves giving the Spirit more than Dads love giving gifts to their kids. “Much more,” in fact, **verse 13**.

So that’s 2 amazing promises in just 3 verses: We can ask and receive, and we can ask for the Spirit because the Father loves to give it. And that’s the first public glimpse we get of the Spirit - as a gift, first of all, and secondly, as the gift of choice to ask for, realizing how much the Father would love us to have it.

The only other glimpses we have of the Holy Spirit before Luke 11 were two private occasions that no one else knew about. First, when Jesus receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism in **Luke 3:22** and next, in his conversation with Nicodemus in **John 3:5**, about the need to be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. But when Jesus goes public with the Holy Spirit, it’s about the Spirit being a gift that the Father himself dearly loves to give, and all one need do is ask and the Father will gladly give it.

Jesus knew about the Spirit, of course, because he’d already experienced the enormous impact of the Spirit on himself, personally. Because of the Spirit, **Luke 4:18**, he was filled to the brim with the desire and drive to “preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind and release for the oppressed.” He knew, therefore, that the Spirit would have the same impact on his disciples if they received it, too. It was of huge importance to Jesus, then, that they receive the Spirit. There was nothing more important.

So in **John 20:22**, after telling his disciples he was sending them into the world just as the Father had sent him, “he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” This was before Jesus ascended, and several weeks before Pentecost. It was a clear and obvious hint of the importance of the Holy Spirit in doing God’s work. The disciples would now have a mighty helper, just as Jesus had. The Spirit would be their greatest gift.

No wonder the Father gives the Spirit so willingly!

But there’s another reason why God gives the Spirit so willingly, and for that we go back in time to Abraham, because the importance of the Spirit comes alive in how long ago it was promised. Paul tells us how long ago in **Galatians 3:14**. “He (Jesus) redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

The promise of the Spirit goes right back to the blessing God gave to Abraham. That's how far back it goes. And Paul explains why in **verse 8**. "[The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'](#)"

How important is the Spirit? It's the heart of the gospel all the way back to Abraham, because the gospel is about all nations being blessed, and the blessing is the Spirit. One day everyone will receive the Spirit. That's the heart and core of the gospel message, foretold in advance to Abraham, and unfolding through scripture ever since.

So when did this incredible blessing of the Spirit become available to us Gentiles? When Jesus redeemed us (**verse 14**). Jesus died "[in order that](#)" the blessing God promised to Abraham might come to us.

Jesus' death was the key; that's when the promise of the Spirit was opened up to us. And there's not a thing we have to do to get the Spirit, either, because it's already been promised to us back in the time of Abraham, and already been given to us through Jesus' death. It's ours, as Paul said, "[by faith \(verse 14\)](#)." Faith in what, though? The faith that this is what scripture foretold thousands of years ago, faith that this is what Jesus' death opened up to us, faith that this is God's plan for everyone, and faith in God wanting us to have the Spirit more than anything. It's the best gift we could receive, and he'd love us to have it.

But Jesus not only redeemed us so we could receive the Spirit, he also redeemed us for what the Spirit does, **Galatians 4:5** - Christ redeemed us so that "[we might receive the full rights of sons](#)."

The gospel from the time of Abraham, then - and the great blessing predicted for us Gentiles - was about humans becoming God's children, with all the rights and privileges that come with that. With Jesus' death those rights and privileges can be ours in full.

And what kind of rights would that include? **Verse 6**, "[Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'](#)"

This is what the Spirit does. As God's sons we have the full right and privilege to call God our Father, but it's the Spirit who makes that real. No wonder the Father gives the Spirit so willingly! It's the Spirit that creates our relationship with him. It's the Spirit who makes God and humans family. This was the goal all along, but now at last, because of Jesus' death, it can happen in reality - and in full.

Paul talks of this in **Romans 8:15-16**, too, "[For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by](#)

him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

The Spirit changes our relationship with God from fear to sonship. We see God as a Father, not a slave-driver. And somehow the Spirit reaches into our heads and hearts and makes that relationship come alive. It's the first spark, the first inkling we have, of God's love.

Until that time our relationship with God is not much better than a dog with its owner. A dog cannot enter into a love relationship with its owner. The owner may love the dog but the dog can't love him back. Animals don't love. They can only react according to a set pattern of instincts, that may appear to be love at times, but they act exactly the same way in the wild with other dogs, too. Wolves lick each other and play, it's what they do, and for a human to interpret that as love when it's done to them is silly. The dog's just being a dog. It's what all dogs do.

That's terribly disappointing, I imagine, to someone who views their dog like a friend, and thinks their dog is loving them when he's licking them and snuggling up with them. But it's when we treat dogs like humans that dogs go bonkers, probably in tune with their owners who are looking for love from a dog, when the dog only views its owner as a member of the pack.

A dog functions best in a pecking order and doing what it's told, just as it does in the wild. In a home, it functions well if its owner tunes into its doggy brain and treats it like a pack animal. The dog responds naturally to a pack leader. It doesn't need rewards to make it behave, it just needs to be told who's boss. It's a master-slave relationship, which functions great for an owner and his dog, but God never intended that for humans.

God's ultimate purpose for us is a loving relationship with us, but we're no more capable of loving him if we don't have the Spirit, than a dog can love its owner. God has to inject himself into us, just like I'd have to inject a human into a dog to have a love relationship with it, because humans can't have a real relationship with a dog. Dogs don't talk, they can't chat over coffee, they can't cry with you, laugh with you or work out problems with you. They can't do any of the things that create deep human friendship. And nor can we do anything to create a deep, loving relationship between us and God, either. Only God can do that through the Spirit.

So, this is how important the Spirit is. It is the first and only means of opening up the relationship God created us for. But God also lets us experience life without the Spirit, too. In **Galatians 4:1-3**, Paul talks about the period in our life when we don't have the Spirit, and what it's like by comparison. He describes it as being "no different from a slave (**verse 1**)," and being "subject to guardians and trustees (**verse 2**)" like children.

We're no better off than dogs. Our relationship with God is like a dog's relationship with its owner. It's a master-slave relationship, where humans view God much as a dog does its pack leader, only worse, because people see God as a distant overseer, judging them by their behaviour and threatening them with punishment.

Without the Spirit we have weird and horrible views of God. We find all kinds of reasons for rejecting him, like atheists do, or all kinds of ways of keeping him from hurting us, like religions do, or we create our own gods to give us what we want, since God is a lost cause! Christians have some pretty weird ideas about God, too, that he's only happy with us and blesses us if we're obeying a list of rules and rituals.

But it's rules and rituals that God wants us freed from, as Paul points out in **Galatians 4:8-11**. "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God - or rather are known by God - how is that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and month and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."

I think of all our fellow Christians wrapped up in Christmas, looking to all the Christmas rituals, family get togethers, and perhaps even Santa Claus, to capture some sort of spirit and atmosphere they're lacking the rest of the year. Or they think it's only by celebrating Christmas with all its rituals that we come to know God and truly worship him.

But, as Paul points out, it's not the spirit in certain days, months or seasons that help us know God better. They're not gods at all. They're the gods we maybe used to depend, but we don't need them at all now, not when we've got the Spirit, because "if you're led by the Spirit," Paul writes in **Galatians 5:18**, "you are not under law." We don't depend on laws, rituals, days or seasons to create our relationship with God, because faith for a Christian is in the "promise of the Spirit (**Galatians 3:14**)."

The whole point of that promise to Abraham was to open up the Spirit, so our relationship with God can at last begin without any need for laws and seasons to create it, or rituals we perform to "get more of the Spirit" in us. That's why the promise of the Spirit is so wonderful. He does the job for us perfectly. So there's no fear we may be missing something by not getting into the swing of Christmas like everyone else, or that we might not be worshipping God properly if we can't get into Christmas - "For," as **Romans 8:15** says, "you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear."

We need have no worry that we're missing out on our relationship with God, or that we're hurting our relationship with God by not even celebrating Christmas at all, because it's not the Christmas spirit we depend on, it's the Holy Spirit.

The Christmas spirit has huge problems anyway. It enslaves people in all kinds of obligatory rituals that many people hate but can't stop themselves doing for fear of making waves. It's a classic example of what happens to us without the Spirit. We try to create a lovely atmosphere and only enslave ourselves some more!

As Christians, then, we've been given the marvellous opportunity to know God as he really is and have a loving relationship with him that doesn't require any rituals, rules or special days. And it was all predicted way back in Abraham's day, opened up to us by Jesus' death, and is ours now purely for believing it's true.

Which takes us back to why it was so important to Jesus to breathe the Spirit on his disciples before he ascended (**John 20:22**). They needed that Spirit, not only for their own relationship with God, but to have the same desire and drive Jesus had to get the gospel out to others to free them from the slavery of this world, too.

And we are on the receiving end of that, because we are among those who understand the gospel and experience being God's children. Well, now it's our turn to receive the Spirit so that others can understand the gospel and experience being God's children.

And that's the other reason the Father would just love us to have his Spirit!