

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading
Worship Service 10:30AM 11th January 2026
Jill Bird leading & Rev Zoltan Biro preaching

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk

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Abbey verse for 2026 Isaiah 41: 9-10

I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Lord we thank you and worship you

Thank you we are your chosen and loved sons and daughters –
Thank you we are called to serve you with joy and love

Lord we thank you and worship you

Thank you that you carry all our fears and anxious thoughts
Thank you for your promise to always be with us

Lord we thank you and worship you

Thank you that you are God almighty strong to help us
We say we trust you for all that is to come in 2026

Lord we thank you and worship you

HYMN MP 1072

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All, Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid; Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine, Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home, Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Song MP 825

Faithful one, so unchanging Ageless one, you are my rock of peace
Lord of all I depend on you
I call out to you, again and again I call out to you, again and again
You are my rock in times of trouble You lift me up when I fall down
All through the storm Your love is, the anchor My hope is in You alone

Song MP 1003

My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like You
All of my days I want to praise The wonders of Your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord all the Earth, let us sing Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the work of Your hands Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have In You

So in 2026, as we begin the new year, we fix our eyes on you Jesus, saying yes to trusting you more closely, serving you with our whole hearts. We put our hand into your hand and walk courageously and humbly into the New Year. Amen

FAMILY TIME The whole world in his hands *An offering will be taken during the following song,*

Song MP 225

*He's got the whole world, in His hand, He's got the whole wide world, in His hand,
He's got the whole world, in His hand, He's got the whole world in his hands*

He's got the sun and the moon, in His hand,
He's got the wind and the snow, in His hand,
He's got the cold and the heat in His hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand

He's got all the Hong Kongers in his hands
He's got all the Iranians in his hands
He's got all the Europeans in his hand
He's got the whole world in his hands

He's got everybody here, in His hand,
He's got everybody here, in His hand,
He's got everybody here, in His hand,
He's got the whole world in His hand.

Children and young people leave for their classes

BIBLE READING 1: 1 Corinthians 12. 4-11

BIBLE READING 2: Matthew 6.1-21

HYMN MP 37

As the deer pants for the water So my soul longs after You
You alone are my heart's desire And I long to worship You

You alone are my strength, my shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You

I want You more than gold or silver Only You can satisfy
You alone are the real joy giver And the apple of my eye

You're my friend and You're my brother Even though you are a King
I love You more than any other So much more than anything

SERMON "Holy Habits: Cultivating What God Has Planted"

If you are a regular at Abbey, you may remember that our Autumn series focused on Spiritual Gifts. God has planted these gifts in us, His people, by the Holy Spirit. Scripture is clear: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit." (**1 Corinthians 12:4**)

We talked about the fact that these gifts are given, not earned. They are planted in us by God Himself. But anyone who has ever tried to grow anything knows that planting a seed doesn't always lead to harvest. A seed holds incredible potential, but potential alone does not produce fruit. Seeds need care, attention, and the right environment to grow. Without light, water, nutrients, pruning, and protection, the seed may remain hidden, or grow into an unhealthy plant.

Our new series on **Spiritual Habits**, or Holy Habits, is about how we *grow* what God has already planted in us. This is not to earn God's favour, not to become perfect Christians, but to grow into mature, fruitful disciples who serve one another with power and love. Some of these habits will help us to encounter God more deeply. Others will help us trust God, even when we don't feel His presence. Yet, others will shape how we live with one another.

This is not a series about spiritual highs. It is a series about spiritual formation. Habits shape character, and character determines how our gifts are expressed. Good habits lead us toward humility, faithfulness, and love, while bad habits lead us toward pride, fear, and selfishness.

In **Matthew 6**, Jesus speaks directly about this; about giving, praying, fasting, and the core values behind them. These are deeply spiritual practices, but rather than talking about the proper way, right technique, or perfect performance of them, Jesus focuses on the reasons for practicing them. He warns: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them." (**Matthew 6:1**) The question is not *what* we do, but *why* and *how* we do it. Jesus exposes something vital, let me use the picture of the seed again: **Spiritual habits can either nourish the seed or poison the soil.**

1. Habits Shape the Soil of the Heart

Jesus repeatedly says: "When you give..."; "When you pray..."; "When you fast..." Not *if* you do these things—but *when*. Jesus assumes His followers will have rhythms, patterns and habits, just as every normal human being has. The question is not *whether* we have habits, but *what kind*. Some of the habits we will be looking at form the soil in which our spiritual gifts grow. Healthy soil produces healthy fruit. Toxic soil distorts even good seeds. Let me give you examples:

- A person can have the gift of leadership, but without humility, it becomes control.

- A person can have the gift of teaching, but without love, it becomes arrogance.
- A person can have generosity, but without simplicity, it becomes self-promotion.

Jesus calls us to assume habits that shape our hearts, not impress crowd.

2. Inward Habits: Growing Where No One Sees

In **Matthew 6:1–18**, Jesus focuses on practices done in secret: giving without applause, praying without performance, fasting without display. Why do you think they are important? Because roots grow underground. Inward habits are not glamorous. They are quiet, hidden, repetitive, but they anchor us.

This is why our first section of our series will focus on **Inward Habits**: Growing in the Word, conversing with God in prayer, practicing restraint through fasting, and reflection and meditation. These habits are like water, nutrients and warmth, they feed the seed, strengthen the roots and shape the inner life. They help us encounter God, yes... but also help us remain faithful when these encounters feel distant.

3. Outward Habits: How Growth Becomes Visible

Later in Matthew 6, Jesus shifts towards how we relate to possessions, power, and other people: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (**Matthew 6:21**) **Outward habits** reveal what has been growing inwardly. The habits of service, submission, simplicity and solitude are like pruning, thinning, and supporting the plant. Simplicity removes what competes for our spiritual growth. Submission bends strong branches, so they don’t snap. Solitude clears space for what truly matters. Outward habits teach us how to carry our gifts in love, not self-interest.

4. Corporate Habits: Harvesting Together

Seeds were never meant to grow alone. Hence **Corporate Habits** are just as important as individual ones. Fellowship, worship, giving, and celebration remind us that: burdens should be shared, joy can be multiplied and growth is communal. Trees generally grow taller and straighter in a forest compared to trees on their own. In other words, Spiritual gifts find their fullest expression in the body of Christ, not in isolation.

5. Concluding thoughts

Let’s be clear: This series is not about becoming flawless Christians. It is not about perfection, but direction; consistency, not volume or growth and not to create feelings of guilt. Plants grow slowly, sometimes unevenly, sometimes with setbacks. But growth happens where care is exercised.

Over the coming weeks, we will explore these **Holy Habits**. Not as rules to obey, but as rhythms that help God’s gifts in us to grow strong, healthy, and fruitful, for the glory of God and the good of one another. Jesus ends **Matthew 6** with a question of treasure and focus.

So I want to ask today: **What habits are shaping your heart? What soil are your gifts growing in? What kind of fruit are you developing?** I hope you still remember that God has given all of us Spiritual Gifts, He has already planted the seed. Now He invites us to cultivate faithfully. “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” (**Philippians 1:6**) Let us learn together how to grow well.

Time of response

Song Noel Richards Kingsway thankyou music

I will seek Your face, O Lord. X4

Lord, how awesome is Your presence;

Who can stand in Your light?

Those who by Your grace and mercy
Are made holy in Your sight.
I will dwell in Your presence All the days of my life;
There to gaze upon Your glory, And to worship only You.

Song MP 335

In my life, Lord, be glorified; be glorified.
In my life, Lord, be glorified today.

In your church, Lord...

In your world Lord --

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION Peggy

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for providing us with what we need and sending your one and only Son to save us from our sins.

You are the light of the world, giving us hope, and you always keep your promises. In the new year, please empower us to spread your love, hope and peace to people around us.

Today's political situations spark wars and arouse worries and fear in many countries. We pray for people in Venezuela and Iran and the surrounding areas. May you comfort people's hearts and protect them from destruction. May they find peace and shelter in you.

You taught us to love one another and give to the needy. The world will not be as you intend without love. As we enter the coldest month of the year, may we follow your will giving particular care and love to our neighbours, the elderly and to all those in need.

As we started Bed4Night this week, we pray that refugees will find warmth, care and love in Abbey and the other churches involved. May you bless all volunteers to use their gifts, show friendship and demonstrate God's grace.

We pray for our town and the Abbey family, may you heal those who have health concerns, may you lead us to navigate challenges in life and may you comfort those who are in distress. May we be your stars in the world, showing your love and bringing more people to find their real treasure is in you.

Father God, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to guide us and to experience your love. May we grow stronger faith in you. Amen.

HYMN MP 445

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

*Shine, Jesus, shine Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze Set our hearts on fire*

*Flow, river, flow Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word Lord, and let there be light*

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

BLESSING May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him for 2026.
May you overflow with God's love into every person and situation you meet this week.
To the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN

THE GRACE

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.

Events to highlight

Today after the service - church meeting

Wednesday 14th 10.30 Renew Wellbeing 12.15 Bible study 2pm ICaf English lesson
7.00 pm Bed 4 the night

Thursday 15th 10.30 Toddlers 10.30 Bible study

Friday 16th 10.30 Prayer meeting 5pm Table tennis

Saturday 17th 9.00 Men's breakfast

Sunday 18th 10.30 Worship service with communion

Jan 19th to Jan 25th Week of prayer for church unity <https://cte.org.uk/>

Jan 21st – 23rd 3 Days of prayer Turn the battle <https://www.turnthebattle.uk/>

Sunday 25th Jan 6.30 pm St Luke's church Erleigh Rd RG1 5LH all welcome as finale to week of prayer for unity

QR Code for Financial Offering:

Scan to book into men's breakfast

