

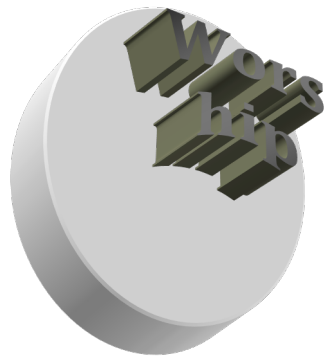
The Means of Grace at GCPC

Word, Sacrament & Prayer
with Discipleship, Fellowship & Care

Discipleship

Family Worship
Intentional Friendships
Sunday School
Peer Groups

Word



Sacraments

Fellowship

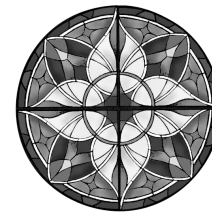
Lord's Day Rest
Home Fellowship Groups
Hospitality
Peer Groups

Prayer

Care

Pastoral Care Teams
Gifts & Service
Mercy Ministries
Outreach Teams

**Growing
in Christ**
at
**Grace Covenant
Presbyterian
Church**



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The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important thing at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church. It promises the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life to all who place their trust in Christ. What good news this is! What's more, the Gospel brings us new life, so that we who have been saved by faith in Christ want to continue to grow in Him. And whether you are with us for a short time or long, it is our prayer that your time at Grace Covenant would make you more thankful for the Gospel and thus a time of great spiritual growth.

What does spiritual growth look like?

Spiritual growth is a hard thing to measure. Sometimes it occurs quietly and gradually, hardly noticeable until years later. Other times, it takes great effort, what Paul calls, "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." But in both cases, we are confident that God is at work in us conforming us more and more to the image of His Son. (See Philippians 2:12-13 and Romans 8:29-30.) Specifically, this means that we will increasingly:

- ▷ Depend upon God daily as reflected in **the Lord's Prayer** (Matthew 6:9-12)
- ▷ Obey **the Ten Commandments** in thought and deed (Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:17-48)
- ▷ Embrace **the Beatitudes** as our own (Matthew 5:3-12)
- ▷ Display **the fruit of the Spirit** (Galatians 5:22-23)
- ▷ Seek **the wisdom from above** (James 3:17-18)
- ▷ Be motivated by **selfless love** (I Corinthians 13; Philippians 2)
- ▷ See our ongoing sin all the more, and thus **continually live lives of repentance and reliance upon Christ** (Romans 7:7ff) .
- ▷ In short, we will grow in **humility** before God and men (Luke 14:11; I Peter 5:6).

How do we grow in Christ?

So how do we grow in these things? Well, the first thing to realize is that by ourselves, we cannot. And so we begin by *resting* in Christ alone and His finished work on our behalf. That is, we learn to trust Jesus not only to *justify* us, but also to *sanctify* us by His Spirit working within us, helping us to respond to our salvation with lives of grateful service and growing holiness.

So what is the role of the Church in these things? In short, the Bible teaches that it is precisely within the realm of the Church where our growth in Christ occurs. We were not meant to walk alone but to be an active part of Christ's body, the Church.

At Grace Covenant, we do not have a huge number of programs or big events, largely by choice. We believe that in this present age, God most often works in ways which are small and unheralded in the eyes of the world but which are nonetheless momentous in the eyes of heaven. That is, we believe that slow, faithful day-by-day growth in the small things is far more valuable than seeking "mountain top" experiences, which can be wonderful, but are often short-lived.

The Means of Grace

What Grace Covenant can offer to all who come our way is the Gospel and authentic relationships built around the Gospel. Therefore, rather than being an event-driven church, we try to be a church which grows in faith and holiness through steady devotion to what our tradition calls the ordinary "means of grace." Very simply, these are:

- ▷ **God's Word** ~ Faith comes from hearing the promises of the Gospel as found in the Bible. We cannot hope to grow if we do not continually expose ourselves to the Scriptures.
- ▷ **Sacraments** ~ Faith is confirmed by the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper within the context of the Church, so that our faith is both personal and part of God's public kingdom, the Church.
- ▷ **Prayer** ~ Faith is further strengthened by prayer, public and private, that we may depend upon God for all things, asking for our needs in accordance with His will and giving Him thanks and praise.

By relying upon these three simple means of grace as God's ordinary way of growing us, we are doing several things which we believe honors God. First, we are trusting God's Word to be wiser than our own ideas. Second, this causes us to fix our eyes not on what is seen (numbers, media attention, etc.), but on what is unseen (Christ's work in us). Third, we are forced to keep things plain, thus requiring the blessing of the Holy Spirit if we are to enjoy any success. This makes us depend upon God all the more so that He alone receives the glory.

When do we engage in the means of grace? The "main event" for these three means of grace is worship together on the Lord's Day. It is there that we *hear* God's Word preached, *see* the Gospel displayed in the Sacraments, and *speak* our praises and requests to God in prayer. However, the Gospel transforms far more than our Sunday mornings. If we are to be a healthy church, these three means of grace must be carried with us into the week so that our faith grows daily. And so we try to "flesh out" the Word, Sacraments and Prayer through:

▷ **Discipleship** ~ *The Word's* wisdom must be applied to particular individuals and situations. At GCPC, this occurs informally in families through parenting and family worship, and among peers by "intentional" friendships, as well as by pastoral counsel.

▷ **Fellowship** ~ *The Sacraments* help display the love and unity of Christ's Body, which must be carried over into less formal gatherings. At GCPC, this is most clearly seen in our various Home Fellowship Groups, peer groups, and occasional church-wide fellowship activities.

▷ **Care** ~ *Prayer* presents our thanksgivings and concerns to God for ourselves and others. It also helps us develop hearts of mercy so that we will seek to meet the spiritual *and* physical needs of those around us. At GCPC, this largely occurs through the attention of our deacons and through our Pastoral Care Teams.

Opportunities while at Grace Covenant

So, what are some practical ways that we can grow in Christ through these means of grace? The opportunities for growing in Christ while at Grace Covenant are simple but many. Some of these are quiet and

ongoing; others are activities which are made known in the bulletin or the church email list which we encourage everyone at GCPC to join.

Below we have listed out many of these opportunities. Some are individual or family disciplines, while others are church-wide or involve small groups. But we list them all together because they all go together. We live our Christian lives not just individually, but as one body, striving to walk together while respecting the Christian freedom of other believers to participate in various opportunities as they feel led. But what all of these opportunities have in common is that they each seek ways to grow in Christ through the simple means of grace of Word, Sacrament and Prayer with discipleship, fellowship and care.

Worship on the Lord's Day ~ Nothing is more important to strengthen one's faith than gathering together with God's people to worship Him, especially in periods of spiritual dryness and struggle. Be faithful in this, week in and week out, wherever you find yourself. A Weekly Devotional is sent out each week on the church email list to help folks prepare for the worship service that coming Lord's Day.

Psalms 100

Rest on the Lord's Day ~ What a gift God gives to us each week by giving us one-day-in-seven to cease from our worldly labors so that we may rest our bodies and souls. Make this weekly resting in Christ a vital part of your life's routine.

Isaiah 58:13-14

Family Worship ~ What was once common among Christian households has now become a lost art. We believe it is a great privilege and responsibility for the spiritual heads of each household (normally fathers) to lead their families in prayer and Christian instruction. If you are unsure where to begin, there are many resources available to help; just ask!

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Personal Devotions ~ Daily prayer & Bible reading are pillars of a healthy, growing Christian's life. Numerous devotional materials are available to help one get started, or one can simply begin by reading a chapter a day, perhaps out of the Psalms or Gospels, along with a time of dedicated prayer. For those who struggle with this discipline, we recommend reading a short essay entitled, *Freedom from Quiet Time*

Guilt available in the foyer. Finally, in a time of great decision or crisis, those in good physical health may do well to **fast** (abstain from food) to increase awareness of one's dependence upon God.

Psalm 1; Matthew 6:16-18

Home Fellowship Groups ~ These are a critical part of GCPC's ministry during the week. We strongly encourage every member and friend of GCPC to be involved in a Christian small group of some kind. Our HFGs pray, study, sing and just generally hang out together. Most mix generations so that we may enjoy the richness of Christ's body, and usually meet from September through May. See the weekly bulletin to learn when the various HFGs meet.

Acts 2:42

Sunday School ~ There are many subjects not easily taught in a sermon that Christians need to think through and discuss. We encourage everyone to take advantage of the many fine teachers God has raised up in our church for children, college students and adults.

Romans 12:1-2

Peer Groups ~ These are an important part of our life together as a church. There are **Youth** Group meetings, Bible studies, and retreats; **Women's** fellowships, Bible studies and retreats; **Men's** fellowships, prayer meeting, reading group, and officer training; **College** student ministries, including RUF; and a **Retirees** Bible study. Check out the weekly bulletin or our webpage for more information on each of these.

Titus 2:2-6

Personal Discipleship & Accountability ~ One of the best ways to grow in our faith is through close friendships with other believers. Consider meeting regularly with another believer of the same gender to talk, pray, hold one another accountable, and even study together. For those desiring internet accountability, see one of the elders so we can tell you what is available.

Proverbs 27:17

Hospitality ~ Having people over to your home is one of the best ways to extend the fellowship of the Lord's Supper into our lives. Consider inviting not only your close friends, but those who are newer to the church into your homes for a simple meal or coffee and games.

I Peter 4:9

Pastoral Care Teams ~ Every member and friend of GCPC is placed in a Pastoral Care Team, headed up by an elder and a deacon (or sometimes other leaders). The PCTs make sure that everyone is prayed for and cared for in time of need. Our prayer is for God to send us as many people as we can disciple well, and not a person more. Ask your PCT leaders what you can do to help serve your team.

Acts 2:44-47

Pastoral Counseling ~ The pastors and elders are available to provide prayer, advice and biblical counsel to any who desire it. For those who desire more long term or professional counseling, we are happy to refer you to **Associates in Brief Therapy** here in Blacksburg, a Christian counseling center.

Colossians 3:16

Gifts & Service ~ There can be no lasting spiritual growth which does not issue forth in service to others. Pay attention to the various opportunities for service across GCPC. These include the nursery, the music team, work days, and many more. See the list of ministry coordinators to find out who to contact to put your gifts to use.

I Peter 4:10

Prayer Meetings ~ From time to time, the elders call for a church-wide prayer meeting or day of prayer. These should be viewed as more than optional fellowship gatherings, and undertaken with great seriousness by the whole congregation. Corporate prayer manifests a humble dependence upon God that He alone may build His Church.

Ephesians 6:18-20

Fellowship Activities ~ Pay attention to the various church-wide opportunities for fellowship, especially in the summer. These include picnics, wedding and baby showers, game nights and other gatherings.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Outreach Teams & Missions ~ Few opportunities for growth are more fruitful than evangelism and missions. Consider joining one of our short term mission trips or outreach teams. See our brochure on Personal Evangelism for more details.

Colossians 4:2-6

Mercy Ministries ~ The early church understood the connection between body and soul, and so made sure to care for those in need.

Being active in showing Christ's mercy is an essential part of true spiritual growth. Our Deacons lead us in this ministry. If you are in need, or would like to help meet mercy needs, please let them know.

James 1:27

Tithing & Giving ~ While this may seem like an odd thing to list in a brochure on growing in Christ, Jesus Himself says that our money shows where our hearts are. Pray for God to give you a heart of faith and gratitude, so that your giving may reflect your heavenly hope.

Proverbs 3:9; Luke 16:1-13

Marriage Counseling ~ Marriage is a gift to us to help us grow and see our own need for grace more and more. Every marriage needs help now and then. Our pastors, elders and other mature Christians are here to help you work through issues. If more professional or long term help is needed, we are happy to refer you to **Associates in Brief Therapy** here in Blacksburg, a Christian counseling center.

Ephesians 5:21-33

Education ~ It is the responsibility of parents to ensure the best possible education for their children, while at the same time promoting their children's growth in faith. Finding this balance is a matter of wisdom and Christian freedom. Some families opt to homeschool, while others send their children to public or private schools. Several of our families send their children to **Dayspring Christian Academy**. Whichever of these three options you choose, be sure that you continue to be your children's primary teacher of the Gospel.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Christian Literature ~ Take advantage of our small but select group of Christian books and booklets on our church Book Table in the foyer to aid you in your personal growth and study. These are titles which you are not likely to find in a local bookstore, and represent both Christian classics and some of the best of more recent authors.

II Corinthians 10:5

Prayer & Anointing by Elders ~ James tells the sick to call on the elders that they may pray over him and anoint him with oil. We believe that oil represents God's favor towards us in the Gospel, whether healthy or ill, that we may cast our eyes heavenward. From time to time, we all need this extra dose of prayer and reminding of the

Gospel through prayer by the elders. We are happy to pray with anyone in need, either after worship, or by coming to your home.

James 5:13-16