

CORE

LEADER GUIDE

GRACE CHURCH
whoisgrace.com

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ABOUT CORE

The CORE course is designed for new attendees of Grace Church:

- To find and form meaningful relationships with others that will add value to their lives and connect them to our community. All new Grace attendees are encouraged to take CORE;
- To understand their spiritual gifts and how God designed them to make a difference in their families, communities, and church;
- To learn about the mission, core values, and vision of Grace Church;
- To provide information about becoming members of Grace Church. CORE is required for people who want to become members.

People taking the CORE classes will be asked to:

- Attend eight 75-minute long class sessions;
- Complete homework learning assignments, including an online SHAPE assessment and guided devotions;
- Experience a ministry tour to be held immediately before or after Session 6, and connect with a ministry leader in an area of interest;
- As a class, choose an invest opportunity in which to serve together in the community.

At the end of the CORE class, participants who attended six of eight sessions and completed their assignments (honor system) will be eligible to pursue membership and will have a membership interview scheduled with a staff member or elder.

THE CORE CLASS TEAM:

CORE HOST: This person provides a consistent and familiar face for the participants each week and stays in communication with the EQUIP lead throughout the duration of the class. The responsibilities of this role include:

- Introducing each week's topics and presenters;
- Caring for participants: addressing questions, reviewing assignments, following up weekly with email or phone calls, helping connect each person to ministry opportunities and life groups;
- Coordinating the two group experiences: the ministry tour and the INVEST activity;
- Completing administrative tasks for the duration of the class: tracking attendance using the F1 check-in app, collecting class evaluations, setting up the classroom each week, distributing materials, thanking teachers.

TEACHING TEAM: These volunteers should not only be gifted teachers and facilitators, but must bring passion and experience to the sessions they teach. The goal is not to lecture, but to engage the class in learning through dialogue, application, and experiences.

The session topics are divided up in this way:

- **LIVE:** Sessions 1, 2, 8
- **INVEST:** Sessions 3 and 4
- **VOLUNTEER:** Sessions 5 and 6
- **EQUIP:** Session 7

NEXT STEPS ADMINISTRATOR: The administrative assistant will receive a list of names of people who have met the qualifications for membership and will send a link to the membership for completion. In addition, they will help connect participants to ministry leads following the ministry tour by creating contacts in F1. They will also track attendance in F1 for data collection and help Hosts with problems using the check-in app.

SITE PASTOR: Session 8 will be presented in an informal setting that allows the class participants to share a meal, as well as complete the last session. The site pastor will make arrangements for the location and the meal. As the Grace site's chief shepherd, the site pastor will attend Session 8 to teach and to answer any questions.

CODE for Check-In App: _____

*See EQUIP site lead for instructions on using the app.

CORE SUPPLIES:

Hosts are responsible for general supplies. Please see EQUIP site lead if items need replacing.

- Attendance sheet (if needed, to use when recording attendance in Check-In)
- Pens, Pencils, Markers on tables
- Nametags (or Name Tents if the class is large- these are reusable)
- Volunteer Your Time form (given week 5, used for Ministry Tour week 6)
- Class evaluation forms (given week 7)

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

*The **highlighted and underlined** words in your guide are the fill-in-the-blank responses in the participant guide.

Preparing to Teach:

- Know and understand the content of the session well enough that you do not have to read from the leader's guide. There may be quotes you'd like to read (especially where participants need to fill in the blanks), but reading is not teaching.
- Know and understand the content well enough to determine what is most important. Participants must walk out of class understanding the big idea, so which parts of the content need developed and good discussion and which parts can be a simple walk through? Then, you will be able to manage your time well. Please do not consider material to be "optional"; rather, gauge what needs the most time and attention.
- Review the participants guide to familiarize yourself with what the class will be looking at and where they will be taking notes.
- Where there are questions to be discussed, be prepared with appropriate answers. Participants will hopefully come up with a variety of answers, but it is good to know ahead of time what you are looking for.

Leading a good DISCUSSION:

- YOU should not be the only voice in the room. Being well prepared is the key to leading a good discussion. Only when you are confident in your content and delivery will you be confident to allow others to speak and share.
- All participants should have NAME TAGS. Ask them to put them on at the beginning of class because you want to know them and call them by name. Everyone should hear their name because everyone is important!
- When asking the class to brainstorm a list, write responses on the board or repeat it back to the class *exactly as they are said to you*. This affirms and validates the participant. Avoid rewording everything into your own words. You're not the expert. 😊

Teaching a LARGE class (3+ tables, 15+ people)

- Join in group discussion at a different table each time the class breaks into small groups for discussion.
- If you're going to pass out Scriptures to participants who will read them as some point during class, ask the HOST to show you who are the quieter participants. This is a perfect opportunity to hear their voice because all voices should be heard!

Teaching a SMALL class (1-2 tables, less than 15 people)

-When a class is smaller than 5 or 6 participants it is appropriate to sit at the table with them while you teach and lead discussion.

-When a list of Bible references is given with instructions to give one to each table/group, the first 2-3 verses are the best to use for discussion. Participants can read the other verses after class OR each individual can read a verse and then share their insight with the rest of the class.

TIPS FOR HOSTS

Preparing to Host:

- Work with your site lead in advance to set up and coordinate the two group experiences: Ministry Tour and Invest opportunity.
- Coordinate with the site lead to set up a ministry tour before (for a 9:15 class) or after (for an 11:00) Session 6. Be prepared to submit participant forms to the Next Steps Administrator.
- Check for a ServErie date or for other local opportunities to Invest at <http://whoisgrace.com/invest/local-opportunities/>. This is an important part of CORE and a value (Outward Focus) of the church. Come prepared to offer the class one or two days/times to serve together.
- Pray for each participant and each teacher.

Building Relationships:

- NAME TAGS should be worn by everyone every week. No names will be forgotten, teachers can easily call people by name, and people will be more comfortable talking to someone new.
- EMAIL the class each week. This doesn't need to be lengthy- include the BIG IDEA from the previous class, mention something poignant from the lesson, indicate your excitement to see everyone again and to learn about next week's BIG IDEA.
 - *Send an email before Session 1 to welcome participants, send them the link to the CORE page at www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass and let them know they can complete the SHAPE assessment any time before Session 5.

Hosting a LARGE class:

- Be ready to greet everyone as they come in the door every week.
- Talk to all the participants at one or two tables every week (not the same tables every week though!)

Hosting a SMALL class:

- Be sure to talk to every participant every week.
- Consider asking one participant each week if you can PRAY for them that week- ask for specific concerns.

CORE CLASS: SESSION 1

Big Idea: Maturing Christians participate in a local church.

Key Texts: *so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

Romans 12:5

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25

| | Supplies Needed |
|---|---|
| <p>Introduction (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with their CORE Host. Participants will introduce themselves to others at their table. Participants will brainstorm ideas about having a mission.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | CORE Participant Guides, Bibles, pens/pencils |
| <p>A. Saved by Grace through Faith (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will understand God’s plan for people to enjoy a relationship with Him.</p> | |
| <p>B. Understanding the Church Mission (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will understand the mission of Grace Church to make and be fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.</p> | |
| <p>C. Catching the Vision (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review the five-year vision affirmed by Grace Church members in September 2011.</p> | |
| <p>D. Embracing Core Values (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will consider and discuss the five core values of Grace Church.</p> | |
| <p>E. Saved into Community (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will consider and discuss scriptures that describe salvation in community terms. Participants will discover first steps toward living in community.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | |
| <p>Homework for Next Session (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review homework for the coming week.</p> | |

GOALS:

1. Participants will understand salvation by grace through faith.
2. Participants will understand what it means to be a “fully-devoted follower” of Jesus Christ.
3. Participants will understand the vision and core values of Grace Church.
4. Participants will understand that believers in Christ are saved into community,

PREPARATION

- Host and Teacher- please review the “TIPS” pages at the beginning of this Guide in order to be fully prepared to lead a great session!
- Hosts- It would be beneficial to have the www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass page ready to show participants at the end of this sessions. Many of their assignments throughout the class sessions will be located here.

INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY: Hello! I’m so glad that you’ve each decided to join me on this CORE journey! The next 8 weeks are going to be exciting. First, let me introduce myself and then we’ll take a look at what this class is all about.

Introduce yourself (name, role at Grace Church, why you want to host CORE) and have participants write down your contact information in their participant guide on the About CORE page. Use the table of contents and About CORE page to talk about what they can expect from the next eight weeks. Don’t read through it word-for-word, but highlight a few things (like the Invest Experience and Ministry Tour) and allow them to look through it.

HOST SAY: If you haven’t done this already, let’s start today by introducing yourselves to other people at your table. Tell them:

- **your name and your occupation**
- **what brought you to Grace Church and why you’re taking CORE**

HOST SAY: Our big idea for this first session is ►maturing Christians participate in a local church. So we’re excited that you are here, taking a step in being part of Grace church. Today we’re going to learn about what it means to be a Christian and what Grace Church is all about. Introduce Session 1 teacher.

HOST PRAYER: Before we begin let’s ask God to bless our time together.

A. SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH: It all starts with a relationship with Jesus.

TEACHER SAY: We’re going to start by talking about the foundation of Christian faith, and that’s a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. Can we have four volunteers to read aloud the numbered sections in your Participant Guide, including the verses?

Suggestions: Sketch Bridge Illustration as participants read to provide a visual element.

1. God’s plan is that we would enjoy a **relationship** with him.

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:4-6

2. We broke that relationship through our drive to control our own lives. The Bible calls this **sin**.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

Romans 3:23

*but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.*

Isaiah 59:2

We attempt to bridge this gap between ourselves and God on our own -- either by being more religious or more moral. But none of our attempts has a chance of being successful.

3. God made a way to **bridge** the gap.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

4. And Jesus tells us to put our faith in **Him** and be **saved**.

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Romans 10:9-10

SAY: Christians call our adoption as children of God "being saved," because a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ, His Son, saves us from an eternity spent apart from God. We are saved from a life on this earth that has no meaning. I want to pause now and pray a prayer of salvation. If you are in this room today and have not asked Christ to be your Savior please pray along with me.

PRAY

SAY: If you prayed that prayer with me or if you have questions about your relationship with God and want to talk with someone, there are several ways to connect with someone who would be happy to talk with you:

- **Email me or your CORE Host.**
- **Email Grace Church at NextSteps@whoisgrace.com**
- **Talk to a member of your Site Pastor Team, who will be in the church atrium on Sunday mornings. See the Appendix for names of Site Pastor Team members.**
- **Talk to your Site Pastor or email him at [his first name]@whoisgrace.com**

This could be the most important conversation you'll ever have!

B. UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH MISSION: As a church, our *MISSION* spells out our goal...the primary purpose for what we do.

SAY: Beyond our individual salvation, we have a God-given task that we call our church *mission*. Our mission is important, just as it is to any organization. See if you can identify the name of these companies after hearing their mission statement.

“To be our customers’ favorite place and way to eat and drink.” [McDonald’s]

“To organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.” [Google]

Like McDonald’s and Google we join together at Grace Church to accomplish our mission. Our mission keeps us **focused** and gives us a common **direction**. Unlike McDonald’s and Google, we didn’t just make up our mission- it was pre-established for us by Jesus.

Read the next two Scripture passages in your Participant Guide and then discuss the questions that follow with those at your table.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **Matthew 28:16-20**

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. **Acts 4:31**

- **In your own words, what did Jesus say the mission of the church was?** (Hint: look for the action verbs in the Matthew passage) **Why is this mission important to the church?**
- **What resources did Jesus promise to His followers in these verses, so that we can accomplish the mission He gave for the church?**

[Give the class participants several minutes to discuss the questions with those at their table.]

SAY: Our Mission at Grace Church is based upon the Great Commission given by Jesus. We say it like this:

Grace Church exists to make and be fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

SAY: So if our mission is to make and be fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ, shouldn’t we know what that means? Let’s look at the Appendix. Simply put, a fully-devoted follower is someone who takes next steps to:

- **Learn** about Jesus = **Spiritual Disciplines**
- **Live** like Jesus = **Action**
- **Be** like Jesus = **Character**

C. CATCHING THE VISION: Our *VISION* is our plan to achieve our mission.

SAY: Grace Church has a plan for fulfilling the mission Jesus gave it, and we call that our **Vision**.

The vision of Grace Church for how to fulfill its mission came through many hours of prayer and conversation, trusting that God would make clear the vision that He meant for the group of believers at Grace Church. The members of Grace Church have affirmed this vision and continue to pursue this vision together. If you become a member of Grace Church, you will be asked to join us in making and being fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

For homework you will watch a vision update video from Pastor Derek, but here is the Grace Church vision at a glance. (Be brief as you go through each of these. The video will thoroughly explain them.)

OUR FIVE-YEAR VISION:

SAY: We are just finishing a 5-year plan that Grace church laid out in September 2011 that included the following initiatives:

1. 3 more **multi-site locations** (plus Grace online)
2. 50 **local churches** serving the Erie community together (ServErie)
3. 2 global church-to-church **partnerships**
4. 936 **weeks** (birth through high-school graduation) of partnering with parents to encourage Christ-centered families
5. 212- raising the temperature of **life-on-life discipleship** to the boiling point, so that people become reproducing followers of Jesus through their own personal growth.

D. EMBRACING CORE VALUES: Our *CORE VALUES* are how we behave as we pursue the vision to achieve the mission.

SAY: Let's take a look at Grace Church's core values. Our mission statement tells us where we are going -- our vision statements tell us how we're going to get there -- our core values tell us how we are going to **behave as we get there**.

ASK: Would someone volunteer to read aloud the five core values of Grace Church?

Accessible Biblical Truth

We value the Bible and won't pull punches or water it down. At the same time, we strive to make the Scriptures clear and applicable for real life.

Authentic Relationships

We won't just put on our "Sunday best" and pretend everything is okay. We create environments where it's safe to share stories of struggle, triumph, sadness, doubt, and hope.

Spiritual Vitality

Our gatherings are marked by spiritual energy and passion. We're fueled by our desire to continually take next steps in our relationship with Jesus.

All In

God created us with unique skills to do ministry. We strongly believe that everyone at Grace is here for a reason. The church doesn't function well unless we're all involved.

Outward Focus

The stakes are high. Our hearts will beat fast, our hands will be busy, and our wallets will be open for those who are far from God.

[Divide the class into groups and ask each group to take a look at one or more of the core values.]

SAY Take some time to discuss the following questions with your group, as the questions pertain to the value you have been asked to consider.

- **What would it look like for an individual person to embody this core value?**
- **How do you see this core value being lived out at Grace Church?**
- **Explore some scriptures that support these values:**

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Accessible Biblical Truth – | 2 Timothy 3:6-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 |
| Authentic Relationships – | Matthew 22:36-40 and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 |
| Spiritual Vitality – | John 7:37-39 |
| All In – | Romans 12:3-8 |
| Outward Focus – | Matthew 28:19-20 |

E. SAVED INTO COMMUNITY: THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY: We're told to do it TOGETHER.

SAY: God definitely has an individual purpose for each of us. God gave personal instructions to Old Testament leaders like Moses (giving the Law on Mount Sinai) and Joshua (instructions for battle); and to New Testament leaders like Peter, Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

We also can see throughout Scripture that God intended for people to live together in community. God never intended for us to have solitary lives. Early in Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, God says, "It is not good for man to be alone." People are designed by God to give encouragement, humor, faith-building, and even correction to one another. In the church – the body of Christ on earth – we see living together in community at its very strongest.

So, looking at the true/false statements in your participants guide, are they true or false?

True___ False___ God has a design and purpose for each of us individually.

True___ False ___ God intends for us to live the Christian life together.

ASK: Who will volunteer to read one of the following Scripture passages aloud for us?

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
Acts 2:42, 46-47

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

1 Peter 1:22

ASK:

- **How do these verses describe salvation in communal terms? Look at the verbs that describe what these early believers did together.**
- **While there is much to learn from individual prayer and Bible reading, why do you think Christians were told to be active in their faith and lives *together*?**

ASK: **Since we can see in Scripture that we are called by God to be active in each other's lives -- and we ourselves have experienced the benefits of it --what are some of the roadblocks to watch for, roadblocks that keep us from living out our salvation in community?**

ASK: **How can we counteract those barriers to community?**

SAY: **So, practically speaking, how do we start living in community?**

- **Let me say to you, "Congratulations!" Because participating in this **CORE** class is a great first step toward living in community.**
- **We can start living in community by attending Sunday morning worship **regularly**.**
- **We can join a **Life Group** – a small group of believers that meets regularly, perhaps every other week, to support and encourage one another to live every day for Christ. At Grace Church we have come to believe that joining a Life Group is the number one way to get to know other Christians and to begin living the life we were meant to live as a Christian! We will talk more about Life Groups in other CORE sessions.**

Prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Visit www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass to watch Pastor Derek Sanford's update on the vision for Grace Church.

Devotions:

1. The "one another" verses in the New Testament give instruction on interacting with other believers. Read Ephesians 4:32. What are the three ways Paul instructs the Ephesians to act toward one another? Think about Grace Church: do you see these actions happening? Consider your own heart and attitude: are you treating other Christians this way? Pray and ask God to help you develop a heart toward other Christians that is more like the one Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:32.
2. During a quiet time with God this week, read some of the scriptures about a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ in the Appendix. Talk to God about how you are doing as a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- Email the class: Thank them for coming and ask if they have any questions.
- Do the homework! Include a short personal reflection in the group email.
- Give a sneak peak of Session 2 and ask them to bring their Bible (or phone).

CORE CLASS: SESSION 2

Big Idea: Following Christ includes reading His Word and talking with Him in prayer.

Key Texts: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Colossians 4:2

| | Supplies Needed |
|---|---|
| <p>Introduction (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host. Participants will review the homework from Session 1: “One Another” devotion Introduction to L.I.V.E. Participants will explore their attitudes toward the Bible when growing up.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | Bibles, CORE Participant Guides, pens/pencils |
| <p>A. The Bible on the Bible (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will survey what the Bible says about itself.</p> | |
| <p>B. Connect to God through the Bible (up to 25 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will be introduced to several Bible study methods. Participants will practice a Bible study method.</p> | |
| <p>C. Connect to God through Prayer (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will discuss prayer and practice using the Lord’s Prayer and/or the ACTS acronym to structure their prayer time.</p> | |
| <p>D. Common Problems Connecting to God (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will brainstorm solutions to common problems people experience when reading the Bible and/or praying.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | |
| <p>Homework for Next Session (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review homework for the coming week.</p> | |

GOALS:

1. Participants will practice different methods of connecting with God through the Bible.
2. Participants will practice different methods of connecting with God through prayer.
3. Participants will learn practical pointers on prayer.

Presenter: _____

Contact Information: _____

FOR THE LEADER

This lesson will introduce class participants to the spiritual disciplines of devotional Bible reading and prayer. Every believer knows these spiritual disciplines should be central in their lives. However, to read the Bible regularly and to pray regularly requires self-discipline. Many Christians go through life without a vibrant relationship with God because they do not practice these disciplines.

Scripture offers help with Bible reading and prayer. The Holy Spirit guides and assists believers to understand the Bible (**John 16:12-13** and **1 Corinthians 2:11-13**). The Apostles viewed the scriptures as one of the primary tools God used to shape disciples into God's image (**2 Timothy 3:16-17** and **Hebrews 2:5, 11**). The Holy Spirit also helps believers in their prayer life (**Romans 8:26**).

During this session, you will cover some basic Bible study and prayer skills that will help class participants become more comfortable having daily times with God. Remind class participants that joining a Life Group will provide ongoing support and community to help them stay grounded in Bible study and prayer for life. There is power in the fellowship of small groups to help individuals learn and practice these spiritual disciplines. Encourage everyone to join a Life Group when the CORE class is over.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome everyone to this session of CORE.

HOST ASK

- **Would someone please read Ephesians 4:32 aloud for us and share how you have seen the actions in this verse lived out?**

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

- **Can someone else share ways that they are trying to be more like this verse?**

HOST SAY **This week we begin exploring a portion of the L.I.V.E. acronym. L.I.V.E stands for “Live in Community, Invest in Others, Volunteer Your Time, and Equip Yourself.” As a church, we believe these are four components of a life lived for Jesus. Each week, we’ll be looking deeper at one of these components.**

HOST SAY **This week we are diving into the Equip Yourself portion of the acronym. We’re going to be exploring two spiritual disciplines that are vitally important in order for us to have a close relationship with God. Today’s Big Idea is, ►following Christ includes reading the Bible and talking to Him in prayer.**

HOST SAY **Let’s begin this session by talking at your tables about how we experienced the Bible growing up.**

Discussion Questions:

- What attitudes about the Bible did you pick up from your family growing up?
- What role, if any, did the Bible have in your family?

[Give the class 3-4 minutes for discussion.]

HOST SAY: Some of you grew up strongly connected to the Bible as a source of wisdom and direction; some of you might have picked up a distorted view of Scripture -- that it was a rule book or a collection of fables – and some of your families never mentioned the Bible. Today we are going to discover what the Bible says about itself. Our presenter _____ will give us suggestions about how to get the most out of Bible reading and time in prayer. But first, let's ask for God's blessing on our time together.

PRAYER.

A. THE BIBLE ON THE BIBLE

TEACHER SAY ► **Following Christ includes reading the Bible and talking to Him in prayer**, so it is important to understand the Bible's authority over us. Reading the Bible is unlike reading any other book, since the Bible embodies God's self-disclosure to humanity.

(1) The Bible says it is God's **authority**.

TEACHER ASK I need two volunteers. Who will read aloud 2 Timothy 3:16-17? And who will read aloud 2 Peter 1:20-21?

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. **2 Peter 1:20-21**

SAY Paul said (in the 2 Timothy passage) that God's Word was inspired by God. The word "inspired" literally means "**God breathed**."

Discussion Questions

- Where else in the Bible did God create with His breath?

[**Genesis 2:7** then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.]

[**John 20:21-22** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."]

- What does this word choice tell us about God's relationship to His Word?
- According to Peter, what role did human authors have in the writing of Scripture?

SAY When we say that the Bible is authoritative, we are acknowledging that the Bible was not our idea, it was God's. He breathed His authoritative message into the minds and imaginations of the writers of the Bible. This is the source of the Bible.

(2) The Bible says it is God's power to **change** us.

ASK Who will volunteer to read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 aloud to us again?

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Discussion Questions:

- According to this passage, how does the Bible prepare us for "every good work?"
- Paul says in this passage that the primary goals of studying the Bible are spiritual maturity and preparation for doing good works. What are some misguided reasons to read the Bible?

(3) The Bible says God's **Holy Spirit** will help us understand it.

ASK Who will volunteer to read John 16:12-13 aloud to us?

¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **John 16:12-13**

ASK Who will volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 aloud to us?

¹¹For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. **1 Corinthians 2:11-13**

Discussion Questions:

- How do these passages describe the Holy Spirit's role in our lives?
- How does the Holy Spirit guide us "into all the truth?"

B. CONNECT TO GOD THROUGH THE BIBLE

SAY Let's look at the first discipline in following Christ, reading the Bible. Often times, we have the desire to know God more, to open and Bibles and find His Words, but we're not sure where to begin. So, let's explore some ways we can get into the Word of God.

(1) **Prepare** to Study the Bible.

- (a) Buy and use a good study Bible.
 - The ESV and the NIV are excellent choices.
 - Youversion.com and Biblegateway.com each provide (for free) several versions of the Bible and access to commentaries, as well as reading plans.
- (b) Find a time and place that will work consistently in your schedule for you to read the Bible. At Grace we say, "Find your **chair**."
- (c) Set aside time. Start with the amount of time you feel comfortable with and work toward increasing that time.
- (d) Pick a specific book of the Bible to read. Luke and John (both in the New Testament) are good places to start.
- (e) Pray for the Holy Spirit's help. This is important! Ask God to speak to you through His Word.

(2) Methods for Reading Scripture

(a) Method: Basic Devotional Reading

Prayerfully read the Bible, talking with the Lord as you are reading, trusting Him to teach you His Word. One way to do this is "lectio divina." This is an historic church practice where one reads the word, reflects on what God is speaking to the heart, then reads the word again, asking God to show Him the truth of that word.

(b) Method: Three Questions Devotional Reading

Another method to approach your time with God involves asking three questions of every passage you read:

Question 1: What does this passage say about **God**?

Question 2: What does this passage say about **people**?

Question 3: What does this passage say about the **relationship** between God and people?

[Divide class participants into small groups and give each group one or more of the following passages.]

SAY Read one of the following passages and apply the three questions to your study of the passage.

- Psalm 1
- Matthew 8:5-13
- Luke 19:1-10
- Ephesians 5:1-4

Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1

⁵ When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, ⁶ "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." ⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it. ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Matthew 8:5-13

He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:1-10

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Ephesians 5:1-4

ASK: Would someone from each group tell us which passage your group looked at and then share your answers to the three questions?

Question 1: What does this passage say about God?

Question 2: What does this passage say about people?

Question 3: What does this passage say about the relationship between God and people?

(c) Method: 15-Minute Devotional Reading

1. **Slow Down** (1 minute).

Be still and quiet. Prepare your heart. Take a few deep breaths and wait on God.

2. **Read** the Word (4 minutes).

Read your passage for the day or begin where you left off the day before. Read until you feel that God has told you something. Then stop and think about it.

3. **Meditate** on the Word (4 minutes).

Think about what the passage means in your life. Write down your thoughts in a journal.

4. **Apply** the Word (2 minutes).

Write in your journal how this passage applies to you. A good question to ask is, "If I were to take this passage seriously, what would I need to do differently this week?"

5. **Pray** (4 minutes).

Conclude your quiet time by talking to God about what He has shown you and by making requests to Him from your prayer list.

SAY If you're ready to start reading the Bible regularly, and you're not sure where to begin, each week Grace offers a reading plan that is connected to the sermon series. You can find it on the website at www.whoisgrace.com/read or on the Grace app.

SAY See the Appendix of your Participant Guide for a description of the Inductive Bible Study method, a more advanced method you may want to use as you become more familiar with studying the Bible.

C. CONNECT TO GOD THROUGH PRAYER

SAY It is difficult to talk about reading God's Word without talking about prayer, and we should not do one without the other. But, again, we sometimes desire to pray, yet struggle with prayer. It is not unusual for

people to find prayer a difficult discipline, but please don't be discouraged! God is eager for us to talk with Him and to listen to Him. Let's look at some ways in which we can do this.

SAY **Prayer** was a necessary part of Jesus' life on earth. Often he would get up early in the morning and go away from His disciples to pray alone to God. Sometimes His disciples seemed concerned about this, as we find recorded in the book of Mark, chapter 1, verses 35 through 38:

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

(1) The Lord's Prayer

SAY When teaching His disciples how they were to pray, Jesus said

⁹ Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:9-13

Practice: Apply the Three Questions method for reading the Bible to the Lord's prayer.

[Let the class participants cover the following questions at tables or as a large group.]

Discussion Questions:

Question 1: What does the Lord's prayer say about God?

Question 2: What does the Lord's prayer say about people?

Question 3: What does the Lord's prayer say about the relationship between God and people?

(2) ACTS Acronym

SAY The Lord's prayer contains several elements which we should also use in our prayers. Many people find it helpful to use the ACTS acronym to remember these elements and to structure their prayer time:

- A – **Adoration**
- C – **Confession**
- T – **Thanksgiving**
- S – **Supplication**

Practice: Use ACTS to write your own short prayer in your Participant Guide.

(3) Practical Pointers on Prayer: Let's talk about how we actually do this in our lives. I've got several suggestions that you can write down and I want you to share what you've found to be helpful too.

[The underlined phrases are the practical suggestions that participants can write down. Consider writing them on the board, or asking the HOST to write them while you talk.]

SAY Some of our prayer time is private, alone with God. At other times, we pray with other believers. All through our day, we can communicate with God as His Spirit brings matters to our attention – not just at one specific time in one specific place. It may be helpful to keep a list of current prayer needs, perhaps on your phone.

God knows us so well; we don't want to minimize our weaknesses in conversation with Him. Therefore, instead of a general asking for forgiveness of sins, be specific about what the Holy Spirit is showing you: "God, be merciful to me a sinner, a sinner who knows that pride is a sin, yet gives in to it constantly."

Some people use household items or daily activities as reminders to "...take every thought captive to obey Christ..." as Paul urges Christians to do in 2 Corinthians 10:5. For example:

- When the alarm clock goes off, pray Psalm 118: 24:

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it, perhaps changing "let us" to "I will."

- When you're taking a shower – cleaning your body – take the opportunity to cleanse your spirit as well, praying again from Psalms:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!* Psalm 139:23-24

Praying out loud, actually hearing the words in the everyday language you use, sometimes makes the experience more real. A related prayer experience is praising God out loud in songs of worship.

ASK Can someone give us an example of a practical reminder about prayer that has been helpful to you?

[Allow a few minutes for responses from class participants.]

D. COMMON PROBLEMS CONNECTING TO GOD

SAY **Let's be honest, sometimes it is difficult to connect with God in prayer. What are the barriers that hold us back?**

[Share the following and allow participants to add to the list.]

- **Problems with discipline:** making time to read the Bible and time to pray.
- **Problems with dry spells:** Bible reading and prayer seem to have little impact.
- **Problems with concentration:** keeping your mind from wandering.

SAY **Brainstorm with those at your table about how to overcome these challenges. Then we will ask someone from your table to share your thoughts.**

[Give class participants about 5 minutes for discussion, then ask for responses from each table.]

Example suggestion for problems with concentration: Writing your prayers out in a journal can help minimize distraction and allow your thoughts to flow.

SAY **If you'd like to learn more about prayer, check out the sermon series from February 2016 at www.whoisgrace.com/sermons or on the Grace App. Also, Grace has an online prayer wall where you can submit requests and praises. Find that on the home page or on the Grace app as well.**

PRAYER

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION:

Personal Devotions: Scripture Reading and Prayer

1. Read Philippians 2 using the Three Questions Method

Read Philippians 2 again: What does this chapter say about who God is?

Read Philippians 2 again: What does this Scripture passage say about who I am?

Read Philippians 2 again: What do these verses say about God's relationship with me?

After reading and meditating on Philippians 2, use it to guide your prayer time.

2. Pray using the ACTS method:

Adoration: Praise God for who He is.

Confession: Confess how you are falling short of being like Christ.

Thanksgiving: Thank God for what He has given you and for what He is doing in your life.

Supplication: Ask God for His will to be done in your life and in the lives of those you love.

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- In your email this week, point participants to this week's reading plan at www.whoisgrace.com/read or on the Grace app.

CORE CLASS: SESSION 3

Big Idea: We each have a faith story to share, which is part of God’s story.

Key Text: *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,”* **1 Peter 3:15**

| | Supplies Needed |
|--|--|
| <p>Introduction (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host. Participants will review the homework from Session 2: Three Questions Method and ACTS Method Review Grace’s Mission Statement and the Great Commission Prayer.</p> | Bibles, CORE Participant Guides, pens/pencils, white board and dry-erase markers (or poster board and markers) |
| <p>A. Paul’s Faith Story (Up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will read Paul’s faith story in Acts 26.</p> | |
| <p>B. Common Barriers to Telling Your Faith Story (Up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will explore barriers that often accompany efforts to introduce friends to Jesus.</p> | |
| <p>C. Avoid Faith Story “Killers” (Up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will discover common mistakes that reduce the effectiveness of someone’s testimony.</p> | |
| <p>D. Connect Your Faith Story to God’s Story (Up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will learn and practice presenting the Bridge Illustration, so they can easily present the good news of Jesus Christ to an unchurched friend.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | |
| <p>Homework for Next Session (Up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review homework for the coming week.</p> | |
| | |

GOALS:

1. Participants will understand how to use a simple pattern for sharing their faith story.
2. Participants will become familiar with the Bridge Illustration.

PREPARATION

- Host and Teacher, please review the “TIPS” pages at the beginning of this Guide in order to be fully prepared to lead a great session!
- In this session, if there is time, the Graffiti Bridge to Life youtube video in the homework section would be worth showing during class.

FOR THE LEADER

This week remind your participants ► **we each have a faith story to share, which is part of God's story.**

The common word for faith stories in the New Testament is “testimony.” Testimony is a term borrowed from the world of courts and judges. It is the sworn-to-be-true statement of what a person experienced or witnessed. Within the church, the word “testimony” has come to mean the story of how a person came to know Christ.

One of the simplest testimonies in Scripture is found in John 9. Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. The Pharisees were dismayed that this man's story validated Jesus, so they attempted to intimidate the former blind man into changing his story. They labeled Jesus a sinner. As such, Jesus would not have the power to heal blindness (John 9:24). But the man stuck to his story: *“Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”* The Pharisees continued to question him. He offered to retell exactly how Jesus had interacted with him—asking somewhat sarcastically if they wanted to become Jesus' disciples. The blind man's story allowed him to share his faith in Jesus, even within a very hostile environment.

Later, the apostle Paul gave a defense of himself -- his testimony -- before King Agrippa, as recorded by Luke in Acts 26. Jews had accused Paul of defiling the Jerusalem temple by bringing Gentiles into it. Paul was a Roman citizen and exercised his right to be tried in front of Caesar. Before Paul made his defense to Caesar, he came before King Agrippa. Paul's story, although much longer than the blind man's, is divided into the same three parts:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| His life before Christ: | Acts 26:1-11 |
| How Christ came into his life: | Acts 26:12-18 |
| His life after he came to Christ: | Acts 26:19-23 |

During this session, you will be leading class participants through an experience that will help them begin to develop their personal testimonies.

INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY Welcome back to our Session 2 of CORE. Last week we explored some of what it means to EQUIP Ourselves through Bible reading and prayer. I hope you were able to do the Scripture reading and prayer devotions from Session 2 during the week.

HOST SAY Let's review quickly:

- What is the Three Question Method of Bible reading?
- What is the ACTS prayer method?

HOST ASK Would someone like to share what they learned from reading _____ and praying this week?

HOST SAY This week and next we're focusing on the I of L.I.V.E., Invest in Others. When we invest in others, we need to be ready to share our faith with them. Our big idea today is ► **we each have a faith story to share, which is part of God's story.**

HOST ASK Why do you think it is important that each of us be prepared to share our own faith story?

HOST SAY _____ is here today to help us learn how to share our faith. We know that this is generally one of the most challenging parts of living the Christian life, but it could and will change someone's life.

HOST PRAY: **Let's pray before we begin.**

[Pray that everyone leaves today with a renewed passion for sharing the hope of Christ with those who do not know Him.]

TEACHER SAY **You learned in Session 1 that the mission statement of Grace Church is based on the "great commission."**

TEACHER ASK **Who remembers the "great commission" given by Jesus?**

[As someone shares, ask participants to fill in the blanks in their Participant Guides: "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them...with you always..."]

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20

ASK **Who remembers the mission statement of Grace Church?**

[As someone shares, ask participants to fill in the blanks in their Participant Guides: "to make and be fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ."]

SAY **In the "great commission" Jesus tells us to go into all the world sharing the gospel.**

Ask **Would someone volunteer to read Matthew 9:35-38 aloud for us?**

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Matthew 9:35-38

SAY **We are the workers, but remember that we are not on our own. Just as Jesus gave the disciples power to go out, the Holy Spirit empowers us to share the good news of Jesus Christ.**

ASK: **Would someone volunteer to read verse 1 of Matthew 10 to us, then verses 5 through 7?**

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction... ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Matthew 10:1, 5-7

A. PAUL'S FAITH STORY

SAY We are going to learn how to structure our own faith stories using the same pattern Paul did. We are going to read his testimony from Acts 26. In this passage Paul -- a prisoner at this time -- gives a defense of himself to King Agrippa before he is transported to Rome. As we read, notice how Paul talks about who he was *before* he met Christ, how he *encountered Christ*, and who he has become *since then*.

[Direct participants to look up Acts 26 in their Bible or on their phone. Ask a volunteer to read the passage aloud.]

SAY At your table, use the "Faith Story Worksheet" to describe the three parts of Paul's story: who he was before he met Christ, his encounter with Christ, and who he became after he met Christ.

[Allow participants time to work at their tables. Ask different tables to share about each part of Paul's story.]

B. COMMON BARRIERS TO TELLING YOUR FAITH STORY

Barrier #1- YOU

SAY The first barrier to our sharing our faith is ourselves. If we are not actively walking with God from day to day, we are not going to be ready to talk about our faith. Paul says in Philippians 1:21, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" Let's look at how abiding in Christ kept Paul's eyes open to the opportunity to share Christ.

Ask Would someone volunteer to read Acts 17:22-34 aloud for us?

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'" ²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." ³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts 17:22-34

ASK

- How did Paul share the gospel with the men of Athens?
- In your own life, have you seen an example of someone who was ready to hear the gospel?
- In our own lives, how can we abide in Christ so that, like Paul, we are ready to respond to every opportunity to share Christ?

Barrier #2 - FEAR

SAY **The idea of talking to our friends about God scares us. It's okay to admit that.**

ASK

- **What makes you most nervous about sharing your faith with a friend, family member, or coworker?**
- **If things do not go well when you share your faith, what is the worst thing that could happen?**

SAY **It's absolutely okay to be aware of the risks of sharing your faith. If part of you wasn't nervous, you might be prone to overpower and alienate people with your faith. The fact that you have fears can make you more dependent on God for guidance, and more sensitive to how your friend receives your words.**

Here's the good news: God knows that the greatest **gift** a Christian can give an **unchurched** friend is an **introduction to Jesus**. As you begin the work of introducing your friends to Jesus, you can be confident that God has already gone before you to prepare their hearts.

Barrier #3 – LACK OF READINESS

SAY **God's commitment to helping his followers connect the lost to himself shows up repeatedly in the book of Acts. Let's take a look at how God guided ordinary people to introduce others to Jesus.**

TEACHER TIP:

A God-Fearer was a Gentile (non-Jew) who had become convinced that the God of Israel was the true God. However, the God-fearer did not formally convert to Judaism. This was commonly due to the ceremonial requirement of male circumcision.

ASK **Would someone volunteer to read Acts 8:26-34 aloud for us?**

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south^[a] to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

Acts 8:26-34

ASK

- **What did God do to connect Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch?**

- If you were Philip, how would you have felt as you approached this stranger?
- How did God prepare the eunuch for his encounter with Philip?

SAY Philip not only obeyed the Holy Spirit's prompting, he ran! As a result, he found himself in a perfectly timed encounter. The eunuch was a "God-fearer"— someone who knew that the God of Israel was the true God. However, he did not understand the scriptures he was reading, and he was not aware that Jesus was the fulfillment of those scriptures. The Holy Spirit helped Philip share the greatest gift possible. But Philip had to recognize the opportunity.

ASK: How do you know who to have a faith conversation with?

SAY: Remember, when you are ready to share your faith, the Holy Spirit will bring the opportunities.

Barrier #4 - DIFFERENCES

SAY Let's look at another instance where the Holy Spirit helped a Christ-follower share his faith.

ASK Would someone volunteer to read Acts 10:1-8 aloud for us?

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:1-8

ASK

- What evidence do you see in this passage that Cornelius was ready to hear about Jesus?
- What risks did Cornelius take in obeying the angel of God?

SAY Significant cultural barriers stood between Cornelius and Peter. Cornelius was a Gentile and an officer in the army that was oppressing God's people. Peter had deep religious and nationalistic prejudices that had the potential to keep him from *wanting* to share his faith with the centurion. God appeared to Peter in a vision to convince him to abandon the customs and prejudices that threatened to keep Peter from sharing his faith with Cornelius. Peter confesses all this to Cornelius and his family in the 10th chapter of Acts, verses 28 and 29:

And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection."

In this case, we see that the Holy Spirit worked in both Cornelius and Peter to prepare them for their meeting with each other.

ASK If the Holy Spirit visited you in a dream, how might that change your attitude toward evangelism?

SAY The Holy Spirit is committed to helping us get past the fears and small-mindedness that keep us from truly loving others and sharing our faith with them. Remember, **▶you have a faith story to share, which is part of God’s story.** The Holy Spirit is committed to rooting out any thought or belief that gets in our way.

Barrier #5- DISCOURAGEMENT

SAY Sometimes we pray for someone and share our faith with them, yet they do not make a decision to follow the Lord.

ASK:

- How should we define “successful evangelism?”
- Have you been unsuccessful in your efforts to share your faith?
- Why do we persevere in sharing our faith?

SAY Listening to the Holy Spirit is not always a clean and easy process. There will be ups and downs. However, God is committed to helping us. He loves people who are far from him more than we ever will. We need to share God’s commitment to lost people by overcoming the barriers that keep us from sharing our faith.

C. AVOID FAITH STORY “KILLERS”

SAY We’ve talked about overcoming the barriers to getting the conversation started. Now let’s talk about story “killers” that can derail any faith story. Your unchurched friend might be curious about God, but chances are he or she is also harboring some skepticism. If you’re guilty of using a story killer, you may unintentionally give your unsaved friend an excuse to dismiss your faith story.

Ask Let’s brainstorm some conversation mistakes that could undermine a favorable reception to your faith story.

[Allow participants to create their own list and write it on the board. Try to write down their words and not re-word it into your words. If time allows, talk through at least the following four.]

Long-winded

The first “killer” is being long-winded. Don’t assume that your faith story is so interesting that you have all day to explain it. How you came to Christ is the most significant thing that has ever happened to you. But it may not be that significant to your friend who is listening. It is a safe assumption that you have one to three minutes to tell your story. It’s better to be so concise that your friend asks some questions, than for you to ramble on and on. Think of this as your spiritual elevator speech!

Fuzzy talk

The second “killer” is being fuzzy and vague. A lot of us find it hard to describe a spiritual experience, and so we are unclear with our language. The problem is that the friend we are talking with, on some level, probably really is curious about *how* a person becomes connected to God. If our friend listens to our faith story and can’t make sense of what we are talking about, he or she is going to be frustrated. The opportunity is missed.

Superiority

Each of us recognizes this barrier to communication when we experience it. And we have seen superiority portrayed in movies or on the news -- someone uses their faith in Christ to pass judgment on someone else. An attitude of superiority short-circuits a good testimony in lots of ways, but perhaps the saddest thing is that it misrepresents God. People assume that if God's followers are self-righteous, that attitude reflects something negative about the God they claim to be following.

Religious Words

The fourth faith story "killer" is overusing religious words. Christians have developed a lot of words to describe God and the church. In church circles we might understand terms like "born again" and "sanctification." But using these terms when talking with people outside of the church may create confusion and discourage their interest.

D. CONNECT YOUR FAITH STORY TO GOD'S STORY

SAY So far, we have looked at how Paul told his faith story, we've considered barriers to sharing our own story, and we've talked about what might "kill" a faith story. Now we are ready to take some time during this next week to write our own faith story, using the same structure that Paul used in telling his. The worksheet "Your Faith Story" will be helpful.

Start with "BEFORE." Think back to the type of person you were before you came to Christ. If you came to Christ as a young child, your story may begin with who you were before you decided to make your faith the top priority in your life.

Next is your "ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST." Recall the circumstances that caused you to submit to Christ. Perhaps a period of struggle marks the turning point in your faith. Some of us may have had dramatic conversion stories. Like Paul, we may feel that God swooped into our lives and scooped us up. For others, Jesus slowly and gradually drew us to Himself. No one story is better than any other. Our own story may not have the "fireworks" that another story has. But God draws people to Himself in all kinds of ways through all kinds of people.

In the "AFTER" section of your faith story, be realistic and honest. Your life has *not* become perfect since you became a Christian. However, Christ has made a difference in your life, even if it is just that you are aware of His presence and comfort. Friends who know you well know that you have not yet *arrived* at a state of perfection. It is beneficial to others that you share something in your life that Jesus is working on.

SAY There will come a time in your relationship with a friend when you sense God leading you to share the whole salvation plan. This point in time will probably come only after weeks and months of friendship with that person. Very likely, the two of you already may have shared some of your life stories back and forth.

You may know the time is right because your friend asks you how to become a Christian. Or, perhaps the Holy Spirit will prompt you that it is time to share God's plan for salvation. Whenever that time comes, you need to be ready.

1 Peter 3:15 says ¹⁵ *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*

There is a very clear, nonthreatening way you can explain the plan of salvation to a friend. It's so simple, you can draw it on a napkin, and then leave the napkin with your friend.

The Bridge Illustration. I'm going to use this poster board/dry-erase board to show you this unforgettable way to explain the good news of Jesus Christ to a friend. As I draw and label my Bridge Illustration, please do your own drawing in your Participant Guide. Be sure to add the Bible verses.

If time permits, ask the class to practice using the Bridge Illustration in groups of 2-3.

SAY It is simple, right? And easy to remember. With just a little practice, each of us can draw the Bridge Illustration and, ideally, even memorize the Bible verses that go along with it. But even if we forget the verses, the illustration alone communicates the truth that Jesus is the bridge connecting sinful people to a holy God.

PRAYER

HOMework FOR NEXT SESSION:

1. Write your own faith story patterned after Paul's testimony using the worksheet.
Before > Encounter with Christ > After
2. Practice talking through the Bridge Illustration. Consider inviting someone from class to grab coffee and practice with you! Also, check out the "Share Your Faith" app which you could use to walk someone through the gospel.
3. Watch the "Power of an Invitation" video at www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass. Use the worksheet to work through the devotion. Have you made a point in your walk to reach out to those who may not know Christ? If so, how has this strengthened your relationship with God? If you haven't, what obstacles are standing in your way? What about Maggie and Caitlin's story encourages you?
4. Optional: Watch a creative Bridge Illustration video on youtube: search for, "Graffiti Bridge to Life"

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- Reach out to a participant and invite them to grab coffee with you and practice sharing faith stories and the Bridge Illustration.
- Ask someone to be ready to share their story at the beginning of week 3. (Tip: Don't choose a "talker"!)

FAITH STORY WORKSHEET

PAUL'S FAITH STORY (Acts 26)

BEFORE

What kind of person was Paul before he met Christ?

ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

What were the circumstances surrounding Paul's encounter with Christ?

AFTER

How did Paul's life change after he met Christ?

FAITH STORY WORKSHEET

Write two or three names of people in your life for whom you will pray and ask God to give you an opportunity to share your faith: _____

YOUR FAITH STORY

BEFORE

What kind of person were you before you met Christ?

ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

Describe the circumstances that caused you to submit your life to Christ.

What happened that finally triggered your decision to ask Christ into your life?

What was the most significant thing about your deciding to follow Jesus?

AFTER

What is the most important difference that Christ has made in your life?

“Since believing the good news about Christ and asking Him into my life, I’ve become...”

CORE CLASS: SESSION 4

Big Idea: We are ambassadors for Christ.

Key Text: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.
We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

2 Corinthians 5:20

| | Supplies Needed |
|---|--|
| <p>Introduction (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host. Participants will review Faith Conversations devotion. Participants will practice sharing their faith story. Participants will practice the Bridge Illustration. (Optional homework: Graffiti Bridge to Life video)</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | <p>CORE Participant Guides, Bibles, pens/pencils, dry-erase board or poster board, markers</p> |
| <p>A. Rescuing the Lost (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will engage in two INVEST activities. Participants will be introduced to the Outward Focus of Grace Church.</p> | <p>Newspapers, clear container, 168 small objects (marbles), 2-3 different objects</p> |
| <p>B. Renewing the World (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will learn that they can be used by God to renew the world by acts of service.</p> | |
| <p>C. Sacrificing for Christ (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will understand why Grace Church asks believers to sacrifice and INVEST in others.</p> | |
| <p>D. Receiving Power from Christ (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will understand the responsibility and power they have to be ambassadors for Christ.</p> | |
| <p>E. Recognizing Opportunities to Serve Christ (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will identify the areas of influence where they can represent Jesus.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | |

Homework for Next Session (Up to 5 minutes)

Participants will review homework for the coming week.

GOALS:

1. Participants will learn to share their faith story and to use the Bridge Illustration.
2. Participants will understand the importance of Outward Focus, a core value of Grace Church.
3. Participants will understand the meaning of the term “INVEST” as used by Grace Church.
4. Participants will brainstorm practical examples of INVESTing and choose one for the CORE class to do together.
5. Choose an INVEST opportunity for the CORE class to do together.

PREPARATION

- Host and Teacher, please review the “TIPS” pages at the beginning of this Guide in order to be fully prepared to lead a great session!
- Host, before class, ask a participant if they will share their faith story. Remind them to use the format learned in Session 2.
- Teacher, gather newspapers, clear container, 168 marbles (or other small objects) and 2-3 additional, different small objects for the activities in section A.

FOR THE LEADER

Grace Church has a healthy acceptance of needed change. Grace embraces change, but by no means did Grace invent this organizational bent. The history of the early church can be viewed as a history of change. The founding of the church required Jesus’ disciples to adapt to how they were led. Jesus’ disciples had to accept His departure and His gift of the Holy Spirit as their primary leader (**John 16:5-6**).

The exponential growth at Pentecost required that the church reorganize how it functioned, worshipped, and communed with one another (**Acts 2:40-46**). The church grew in racial and cultural diversity as it grew numerically, sometimes exposing ugly and divisive attitudes in the early believers. Some Pharisees who became Christians wanted to make conversion to Judaism a requirement for following Jesus. The Greek Christians resisted having to submit to the ceremonial laws of Moses, especially male circumcision and abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols.

Initially, the church reacted to this tension well by giving the Greek Christians positions of authority to ensure the equitable distribution of food between the Greek and Jewish Christian widows (**Acts 6:1-4**). However, the church leadership – Paul and the other apostles -- struggled to maintain a consistent voice on the matter, which resulted in a conflict evident at both Antioch and Jerusalem (**Acts 15:19-21**). As the church worked through the process of obeying the Great Commission and becoming the multi-cultural embodiment of Christ, it had to support these changes under sometimes intense persecution (**Acts 8:1-3**).

Grace Church has its own storied history of change. Visit whoisgrace.com/about to learn more about this history of change.

Grace Church has five core values:

- Accessible Biblical Truth
- Authentic Relationships
- Spiritual Vitality
- All In
- Outward Focus.

Today's session looks at Outward Focus:

The stakes are high. Our hearts will beat fast, our hands will be busy, and our wallets will be open for those who are far from God.

INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY Welcome back to another session of CORE. Let's review Session Three.

HOST SAY I hope you were able to watch Maggie and Caitlin's story. How were you encouraged to share your faith after watching that video?

HOST SAY Last week we learned how to share our faith story and how to connect our story to God's story. This morning, _____ has agreed to share his/her story with you.

[Be sure to affirm and thank the participant for sharing their story.]

HOST SAY Last week we also learned how to use the Bridge Illustration as a way to visually show people eternal separation from God and to introduce them to Jesus Christ as the one who died to become the "bridge" between sinful people and a holy God.

HOST ASK Who will volunteer to come up and walk us through the Bridge Illustration?

[Allow class participant to demonstrate on dry-erase or poster board.]

HOST SAY Today, _____ is joining us as we continue discussion the Invest in Others component of L.I.V.E. Our big idea today ►we are ambassadors for Christ.

HOST PRAY [Ask God to give us hearts to be His lights, His salt, His ambassadors to a world that needs Him.]

A. RESCUING THE LOST

Invest Activity #1: Bring to class 3 or 4 copies of daily or national newspapers.

Invest Activity #2: Bring to class a jar or clear container of 168 small objects/marbles/candies.
Bring 2 or 3 additional small objects/marbles/candies.

[Put a copy of at least one complete newspaper on each table.]

TEACHER SAY **Divide up the newspaper pages among those sitting at your table. Take a few minutes to look just at the headlines. Use the markers to circle headlines you find that seem to represent the world we live in today. In a few minutes we'll ask a spokesperson from your table to read the headlines you've found.**

[Allow 3 minutes for participants to scan the newspapers, circling headlines. Then ask for each table's spokesperson to report on their findings.]

SAY **From what you've found, the world around us seems full of troubles, needs, tragedies. Now I want you to solve a simple arithmetic problem.**

ASK **How many hours are there in a week?** [168] Show jar or box.
How many hours a week do we spend at church? [2 or 3] Add 2 or 3 new objects into the container.
When you mix 2 or 3 new objects into the container with all the other objects, what happens?
 [You will not be able to see them or find them.]

Note: If you have a small class, each person could count out items in a pile at their seat rather than you demonstrating from the front.

SAY **We would probably all agree that gathering as a family of believers on Sunday to worship God and to encourage each other is important. In Hebrews we're told, "let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." Even so, to define Christianity by the amount of time someone spends at church is woefully inadequate. Today, we are going to talk about what it means to follow Jesus outside the walls of a church building. There seem to be a lot of troubles, needs, and tragedies out there. Basically, following Jesus means we are ambassadors for Christ.**

SAY **When followers of Jesus refer to "rescuing the lost," we mean sharing our faith so as to move someone from a place of eternal damnation to a place of eternal life in the presence of God.**

Discussion Questions:

- **What images do the words "rescue" and "lost" bring to mind?** [desperate, dying, urgent...]
- **What does it mean to be spiritually lost?** [isolated, separated from God]
- **What responsibility do we have for the people in our lives who seem headed toward an eternity apart from God?**

Let's take a moment now to consider **Outward Focus**, one of the five core values affirmed by Grace Church. Read along silently from your Participant Guide, as I read aloud the meaning of Outward Focus.

The stakes are high. Our hearts will beat fast, our hands will be busy, and our wallets will be open for those who are far from God.

ASK **I'd like to ask each of you to call to mind a few family members or friends who are far from God. [Pause.] What kind of emotions do you experience when you think about them?**

SAY Write down your thoughts for a few seconds and then we'll continue to talk about Outward Focus.

[Allow class participants about thirty seconds to write. ASK a few people to share their responses.]

SAY One distinctive of Grace Church is that we are as committed to people outside the church as we are to people inside the church. This has a great impact on the decisions we make. Since the beginning of the Church, in the book of Acts, change has been part of the fiber of the church. Because the church is the light of Jesus to the world, it must change to reach that world. At Grace Church we are unapologetically wired for change—not to be current, or hip—but to be servants of the gospel of Jesus. We want you to know, up front, that we expect to make real changes and sacrifices for the sake of those who don't know Jesus yet. It's simply who we are. To really feel at home at Grace, you will need to catch that vision and make it your own.

We are ambassadors for Christ. Let's look at what Jesus and Paul said about this.

[Ask for 2 volunteers to read Matthew 4:19 and 1 Corinthians 9:22-23],

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19

I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23

B. RENEWING THE WORLD

SAY Rescuing the lost is the primary way to renew the world, because as the Holy Spirit changes hearts, and believers become more like Jesus, the world will be different. The kingdom of God will grow.

The second major way to renew the world is through our getting personally involved in the world around us and performing acts of service. We ask God to use us as the hands and feet of Jesus.

Let's pause now and each look into our own hearts as we think about whether the way we spend our time shows that we care about the people who are spiritually lost.

- **In what ways do I spend my time to show that I care about people who are spiritually lost?**
- **Which activities that I engage in show that I am concerned for the lost?**

Give participants a minute to think and write. Consider sharing a personal struggle with this and how God has changed your heart/actions.

ASK Would someone volunteer to read aloud the passage in your Participant Guide that was written by James, probably to a group of Jewish Christian house churches outside Palestine?

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

James 2:14-19

SAY James, the brother of Jesus, suggests that having only an intellectual belief in God – without a corresponding change in your life – makes someone no better than **a demon**.

SAY Remember, **We are ambassadors for Christ**.

C. SACRIFICING FOR CHRIST

SAY Followers of Jesus use their spiritual gifts – as well as their resources of time, energy, and money – to advance God’s purposes to rescue the lost and renew the world.

INVESTing ourselves in the lives of those around us is not easy. It means making the advancement of **God’s kingdom** a higher priority than the advancement of our **own interests**. It requires **sacrifice**: giving up what we have for the good of others.

ASK Would someone read aloud the passage about Jesus taken from the third gospel in the New Testament, written by Luke the physician?

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 9:23-26

ASK What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow Jesus?

SAY Write down your thoughts in your Participant Guide.

[Allow class participants about three minutes to write. When everyone has finished, ASK a few people to share their responses.]

SAY **We are ambassadors for Christ**.

Read aloud the following verse and reference:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

ASK This verse comes from a letter written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in the Roman colony of Philippi. What do you think the verse means?

SAY Write down your thoughts in your Participant Guide.

[Allow class participants about three minutes to write. When everyone has finished, ASK a few people to share their responses.]

D. RECEIVING POWER FROM CHRIST

SAY As followers of Jesus Christ, we realize that it is the responsibility of every believer to proclaim the gospel – that is, **the “good news” of Jesus Christ**. We represent Jesus, the light of the world. We are his ambassadors. **We are ambassadors for Christ.**

ASK Would someone read aloud from your Participant Guide the passage from a letter by the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **2 Corinthians 5:17-20**

SAY God does not have a “Plan B” for introducing people to Jesus. He is trusting us to tell our family, our friends, and the world about Jesus and His love for us.

ASK Would someone now volunteer to read aloud from your Participant Guide another passage from this same letter by the apostle Paul?

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**

ASK Who will volunteer to read aloud an empowering verse written by Paul, this time in a letter to the Philippians?

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. **Philippians 4:13**

[ASK class participants to discuss the following questions in small groups of two or three. After a few minutes, ask for responses from each group.]

Discussion Questions:

- **How does being in Christ make us a “new creation?”**
- **How does being a new creation make us an ambassador for Christ?**
- **What enables us to live for Christ?**

E. RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE CHRIST

HOST SAY **We are ambassadors for Christ.** Thank you, _____, for making that very real and very personal for us today.

HOST SAY As believers in Jesus Christ, we each have several areas of influence: our personal lives (**family and home**); our community lives (**work and school and neighbors**); and our lives in relation to **a world of lost people**.

Participating in a Life Group at Grace Church both challenges and encourages us to continually rescue the lost and renew the world. A Life Group is a small group of **believers** who meet **regularly**, perhaps weekly or every other week, for the purpose of **accountability with one another** as we live our lives as ambassadors for Christ.

Right now, as a group of believers ourselves, let's spend a few minutes brainstorming an INVEST opportunity that we could participate in together during before CORE ends. Give me some ideas, big or small, and I'll write them down on this board. The ideas don't have to take a lot of time and they might not take any money! I have been thinking on this for a few weeks now and I have a few ideas that I'll add too. When we've got a list, let's choose a couple to do together.

[Spend at least 10 minutes brainstorming and deciding on an INVEST opportunity that the CORE class can participate in during the coming weeks.]

PRAYER

End the session by leading a time of prayer. Encourage participants to pray for courage to share their faith -- and all that they have -- with a lost and dying world.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

This week pray for courage to share your faith and all that you have with a lost and dying world. Use the scriptures from the session to guide your prayers.

Read Grace's story found in the appendix, "Grace's History of Change" to answer this question:

Why do we embrace change at Grace Church?

Challenge: Memorize this session's key text: **2 Corinthians 5:20**:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Participate as a group in an INVEST opportunity.

LOCATION: _____

DATE/TIME: _____

Complete the SHAPE assessment if you have not already done so. Find the link it at www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass.

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- Contact the class before the INVEST activity to remind them of the details.

CORE CLASS: SESSION 5

Big Idea: God designed each of us for a personal ministry.

Key Text: *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

*Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.*

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.*

Psalm 139:14-16

| | Supplies Needed |
|---|---|
| <p>Introduction (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host. Participants will report on their experience INVESTing in the community, if completed this week. Participants will review completion of online SHAPE assessment. Participants will recite verse by memory: 2 Corinthians 5:20. Participants will put together puzzles and learn why every person at Grace Church needs to use their spiritual gifts.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | Bibles, CORE Participant Guides, pens/pencils, animal puzzles (cardstock, scissors, Ziploc bags, access to a color printer) |
| <p>A. What Is Ministry? (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will read and discuss key New Testament passages that will help them understand how they can best serve God and others.</p> | |
| <p>B. Your Ministry Is Determined by Your SHAPE (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will be introduced to the online Spiritual Gifts Assessment (SHAPE) that will help them discover their spiritual gifts.</p> | |
| <p>C. God Gave You Spiritual Gifts to Share (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will explore the apostle Paul's teaching on believers in Christ receiving spiritual gifts from God.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | |
| <p>Homework for Next Session (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review homework for the coming week.</p> | |

Presenter Name: _____

Contact Information: _____

GOALS:

1. Participants will understand that each believer in Christ is designed for a personal ministry.
2. Participants will complete the online Spiritual Gifts Assessment (SHAPE) to find out more about their own ministry strengths.

PREPARATION

- **HOST:** Contact the Connections Lead at your site to arrange for someone to conduct a ministry tour before or after Session 6. Have sign-up sheets ready to get contact information for the ministry tour (See Appendix for Instructions).
- **TEACHER:** Before class, prepare a puzzle for every 6 to 8 people in your class. (Check with the EQUIP lead and HOST- these may be already completed.) To make each puzzle, size a color photograph of an animal to fit an 8-1/2 x 11 sheet of paper. Print the picture. On the opposite side of the page, write the names of several volunteer ministries available at your site (for example, music ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry, ServErie, Life Group leader, prayer support, Next Steps reception). Cut the puzzle into eight pieces. Remove one piece of each puzzle and set it aside. Place the remaining pieces of each puzzle in its own Ziploc bag.

FOR THE LEADER

The purpose of Session 5 and Session 6 of the CORE Class is to help participants find their place in building up the body of Christ. The New Testament does not describe Christian faith as being something private and personal. Instead, the Bible tells us we are saved into a community of believers. Phrases like "I invited Jesus into my heart" or "Jesus is my personal savior" would be baffling to a first-century believer. Instead, the apostle Paul wrote:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **1 Corinthians 12:13**

and

¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. **Ephesians 4:14-16**

For Paul, being saved into Christ and being a part of Christ's community of the saved are inseparable realities. Three doctrines help us understand the responsibilities of believers in that community of the saved.

1. The Priesthood of all Believers

Peter wrote,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **1 Peter 2:9**

Throughout the history of Israel, the priesthood consisted of a small group of men with responsibility for overseeing the worship of a holy God. But Peter and other New Testament writers make clear that every believer in Christ has a ministry of service before God.

2. The Giftedness of Every Believer

God does not only declare that every believer in Christ is a minister. God also equips every believer to do some form of ministry. Paul writes:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. **Ephesians 2:10**

That word “workmanship” captures the meaning of an artistic masterpiece created by God. Every Christian is beautifully and intricately designed to serve somewhere in the body of Christ.

Paul also wrote to the church at Corinth:

and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. **1 Corinthians 12:6-7**

Paul uses two phrases—“in everyone” and “to each”—that emphasize that every believer has been empowered to serve the body of Christ.

3. The Whole Body of Christ

In her book *Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Culture*, Marlene Wilson writes:

We all fit *somewhere*, but we don't all fit *everywhere*. The theology of the ‘whole body of Christ’ acknowledges that each member of your church has something to offer, but it's a specific something. People aren't interchangeable; you can't just move them around on an organizational depth chart.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for words of services, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of god and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."* ²² *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* ²³ *and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,* ²⁴ *which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,* ²⁵ *that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.* ²⁶ *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

1 Corinthians 12:14-27

God gives specific, unique gifts to each believer in Christ. God not only is interested in "getting the job done," He also is interested in making each member of Christ's church interdependent with the other members.

The Responsibility of Receiving Gifts

During today's session, these scriptures will help class participants build a theology of ministry that challenges them with the reality that they are *already* gifted members of the body of Christ. In their homework assignments for next week, class participants will complete a devotion based on the Parable of the Talents. This devotion will help them realize the responsibility of receiving gifts from God.

Parable of the Talents

Jesus told a brief fictional story -- recorded in Matthew 25:14-18 -- about a man who entrusted large portions of his estate to three servants. Two of the servants invested the rich man's money and doubled their portions. The third servant buried his portion of the estate for safekeeping. After a long journey, the rich man returned and settled his accounts. The two servants who took a risk and increased the rich man's money were rewarded for their faithfulness and were given more to invest. The servant who buried his portion of the estate was severely judged. Even though the servant did no actual wrong, his master -- the rich man -- called him "evil and wicked." Jesus' story conveys two complementary lessons:

People who use the resources the master gives them are rewarded.

People who neglect the resources they are given face a harsh judgment.

INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY Welcome back to the CORE class, Session 5.

HOST ASK:

- (If the class participated in the INVEST opportunity last week) **May I ask one or two people to share about that experience? Now that you have done something like this, does it excite you to do more?**
- **After reading Grace's History of Change, who can answer the question, "Why do we embrace change at Grace Church?"**
- **Who would like to recite 2 Corinthians 5:20 for us, from memory?**

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

HOST SAY Good job! Today we are going to explore the concept of spiritual gifts. In a minute, I'll introduce you to today's presenter, but first let's do an activity that will alert you to how essential your spiritual gifts are to the health of Grace Church.

Puzzle Activity:

Divide the class into small groups. Ask someone from each group to take a Ziploc bag and then distribute the puzzle pieces so that each participant has at least one piece of the puzzle.

HOST SAY **Work with the others in your group to put together your colorful animal puzzle.**

[Allow 2 or 3 minutes for putting the puzzle together.]

HOST ASK **How did one missing piece affect your image of the animal?**

HOST SAY **Flip your puzzle over and quickly put it together using the reverse side.**

HOST ASK **How is your incomplete puzzle similar to what happens when some of the spiritual gifts within a church are not being used?**

HOST SAY **There are, of course, different reasons why all of the spiritual gifts in the church do not get used. One reason is that many people are not sure what their spiritual gifts are. You've taken a spiritual gifts assessment.**

HOST ASK **Would anyone like to share their thoughts after taking the online SHAPE assessment?**

God has equipped every believer to have a personal ministry. That is our big idea for today, ►God has designed you for personal ministry.

HOST SAY **Now let's welcome our presenter for Session 5 of our CORE class.**

Introduce the presenter and explain that person's role at Grace Church.

TEACHER SAY: **My hope for you is that by the end of next week's session, you will understand the part God wants you to play in His kingdom and at Grace Church.**

ASK **Would someone volunteer to read aloud for us today's key text, Psalm 139:14-16?**

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵*My frame was not hidden from you,*

when I was being made in secret,

intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶*Your eyes saw my unformed substance;*

in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,

when as yet there was none of them. **Psalm 139:14-16**

It's our prayer here at Grace Church that by the end of this CORE class, you will understand just how wonderfully God made you. The proper response is not pride or selfishness, but simply gratitude to God.

Once we grasp the magnificent way we were made, and combine that knowledge with an awareness of God’s goodness toward us, then we will want to spend our lives in service to God and His people.

At the end of today’s session, we are going to talk about spiritual gifts assessment – recognizing your ministry SHAPE. We want you to serve in God’s kingdom in the best possible way – which means using the abilities and gifts God gave you for ministry. Using our God-given gifts and passions, we are

- faithful to God’s design and plan for our life;
- fruitful in our work; and
- joyful and energized by what we do.

Knowing our **gifts** and **passions** is an important step to understanding God’s will for our lives. As we express our spiritual gifts, we will bless others and, at the same time, we will be blessed by the satisfaction that comes from being used by God. ► **God has designed each of us for a personal ministry**, and we are committed to helping you discover yours.

The online SHAPE assessment can help you understand your gifts. No questionnaire or survey is perfect. But our experience at Grace Church is that the SHAPE assessment results have great value as a discussion starter. Share your assessment results with people who know you and with ministry leaders. Ask them if your results match their observations of you. By the time you have gotten some feedback, you should have a good idea where to begin using your spiritual gifts. Your unique SHAPE is no accident. It is how God designed you to make an impact on the body of Christ.

Briefly share your personal ministry journey with the class. Be mindful of time.

The Grace Church family needs you to make your mark on this church. Blessings and thanks in advance, for joining us on this journey of discovery, so that we can share our gifts and grow together.

Prayer.

A. WHAT IS MINISTRY?

SAY Let’s think for a moment about what the word “ministry” means. It’s a word that we do not hear very often outside of church circles. “Ministry” is a Latin word for “**service**.” Ministry is service, and a minister is a servant. At Grace Church, we define ministry this way:

“Ministry is using **whatever God has given me** to **serve Him and the needs of others.**”

Some key New Testament passages describe the nature of ministry.

ASK Would someone volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:9-10 aloud for us?

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10

SAY When God established the priesthood for the people of Israel, it consisted of a select group of people. These men served the rest of the Israelite nation by offering their sacrifices and praying on their behalf. Now,

Peter declares that every person who is in Christ is a **priest** -- someone who serves others and encourages them in their worship of God.

ASK

- We tend to categorize people into two groups: ministers and regular people. What do the verses we just heard read from Peter's first letter say about that division?
- How does knowing that God views believers as "a royal priesthood" change how we view ourselves? How might it change how we view other Christians?
- Peter says that we are "God's people" who "have received mercy." How do God's mercy and grace towards us shape our service to Him?

ASK Would someone volunteer to read Ephesians 2:10 aloud for us?

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. **Ephesians 2:10**

SAY There's something lost in our English translations of this verse. The word we translate as "workmanship" is "**poemia**" from which we get our word "poem." It's a word the Greeks used to describe any artistic masterpiece. We can view our gifts and talents from God as part of our unique design -- God's masterpiece.

ASK

- How does this verse in Ephesians speak to someone who might be insecure about his or her gifts and talents?
- What does this verse teach us about the purposes of our life?

ASK Would someone volunteer to read Romans 12:3-8 aloud for us?

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. **Romans 12:3-8**

ASK

- Why does God distribute different gifts to different believers?
- Why is humility necessary in the effective use of spiritual gifts in a church?

ASK Would someone volunteer to read Ephesians 4:11-13 aloud for us?

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

ASK

- According to this passage in the book of Ephesians, what is the role of pastoral staff?
- What is the role of church members?
- What do these verses say is the outcome of this division of work?

PERSONAL MINISTRY PRINCIPLES

Your Participant Guide lists some principles derived from these scriptures:

1. A person's ministry is determined by his or her **makeup**.

Who God made you to be determines what he intends for you to do. God would not give you inborn talents, temperaments, spiritual gifts, and all sorts of life experiences, and then not use them. We believe that by reviewing and studying these factors, you'll discover the ministry God has for you and the unique way God intends for you to serve Him.

2. Using your spiritual gifts is **fruitful** and **fulfilling**.

Have you ever heard karaoke sung terribly? That singer was busy, but his energy wasn't fruitful. We believe that when you use your spiritual gifts, you're making a difference that benefits others. If people around you benefit from your service, then you're being fruitful.

When you are fulfilled while serving, you walk away knowing in your heart that you have done what God called you to do. This does not mean ministry is easy, but doing what God has called you to do energizes you and gives you a sense of well-being. In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Olympic runner Eric Little tells his sister, "When I run, I feel the pleasure of God." When you feel the Holy Spirit working through your gifts, that's the feeling you'll have – feeling the pleasure of God. This changes us to be the way God intends us to be.

3. Ministry is for **everyone**.

Every believer is created, saved, called, gifted, authorized, and commanded to minister. ➡ God has designed each of us for personal ministry, which means you have a personal ministry. We believe serving God and others is at the heart of the Christian life. A non-serving Christian is a contradiction in terms. Jesus said, "A slave is not greater than his master," and then Jesus modeled radical servanthood. All of us who call Him our Savior and Lord are bound by His example.

4. Personal ministry finds its expression in **the local church**.

God knows how to make churches. The Holy Spirit has provided our church with all the spiritually gifted people needed to do everything that God wants to do through us. The question is -- Is everyone being obedient? We believe that our task is to discover, enlist, train, and support each Grace attendee in ministry. Grace needs you! If you are not serving in a ministry, our church is like the puzzle that's missing a piece.

1 Corinthians 12:7 tells us, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." So, our gifts were given to us *for the common good*.

5. The Grace staff members are **administrators**, while the people of Grace are **ministers**.

We saw this principle in Ephesians 4:11-13. Our church staff is hired to train and equip God's people to use their spiritual gifts. When the church functions correctly, the staff won't be able to give away ministry fast enough, to people eagerly wanting to serve!

6. Ministry is a **team sport**.

What do the Trinity, the disciples, and the early church fathers all have in common? They are all groups that ministered in community. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts in a way that promotes interdependency and deep relationships.

7. Serving **changes** you.

When we are using our gifts and talents to serve, it creates a change in us to become more like Christ – to be the person God intends us to be. You grow when you discover your personal ministry. When you find your passion of service, you hear God's voice more clearly and loudly, and you experience peace.

God has designed each of us for personal ministry. God has equipped every believer to have a personal ministry to benefit the church and the community.

B. YOUR MINISTRY IS DETERMINED BY YOUR SHAPE

SAY It is clear that God expects us to use our spiritual gifts. But the questions that present themselves are "how?" and "where?" Some Christians expect the sky to open up and for God to tell them in a vision. Reality is much more mundane than that. But God has already given us plenty of clues about our spiritual gifts in the way He made us.

(The following Lawnmower Analogy is one way to describe the process of discovering spiritual gifts. Teachers, please feel free to choose another analogy or description.)

Imagine that you'd never heard of a lawn mower before. By examining its construction, you'd have a pretty good idea how to use it. The wheels and handle would suggest that it was designed to be pushed. The motor and blades suggest that it was designed to cut something low to the ground. After a little detective work, you'd make the reasonable guess that this was a machine for cutting vegetation.

Discovering your spiritual gifts is similar work. We'll guide you through a process of discovering who you are that will help you see how God wants to partner with you in service.

The SHAPE acronym was developed by Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, to help its church members discover how they were shaped by God for good works. We use their SHAPE model at Grace Church. Here's what SHAPE stands for:

S -- for **Spiritual Gifts**.

We've already discussed that God gives *every* believer spiritual gifts. So you're probably thinking, "What exactly has God gifted *me* to do?"

H -- for **Heart**.

The question to ask next is, "What do I love to do?" When God gives people a mission, He also gives people a passion to accomplish it.

A -- for **Abilities**.

“What *can* I do?” Everyone has natural talents and vocational skills that differ from our spiritual gifts. In the Old Testament, we see God giving abilities to carpenters and craftsmen for the building of the temple. So, everything is spiritual, even those skills that do not seem church-related. It all comes from God.

P -- for Personality.

“Who am I?” Your personality and temperament are clues to understanding your ministry SHAPE. Introverts may not feel comfortable standing in the lobby greeting people. And extroverts often steer clear of ministries requiring quiet and isolation -- like video work or copy-editing. So, your personality is at least a *clue* to the type of ministry to which you are best suited.

E -- for Experiences.

“What have I been through?” The SHAPE assessment will help you chart the positive and the negative experiences in your life. The experiences we each have had in our lives help point us in the direction of our God-given ministries.

2 Corinthians 1:4 says this about God, that He

comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 2 Corinthians 1:4

C. GOD GAVE YOU SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO SHARE

Let’s give some thought to our usual attitudes about giving and receiving gifts. Think about some of the best and worst gifts you have received over the years.

ASK:

- How do you generally respond when you receive a good gift?
- What’s your usual response when you receive a gift you do not like?

Today we will take a look at the “S” in SHAPE -- your spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul knew how critical an understanding of spiritual gifts was for the healthy functioning of a church. And how important understanding spiritual gifts would be to each believer’s sense of fulfilling a mission God meant for them to do.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said

Concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 1 Corinthians 12:1

SAY Let’s explore Paul’s teachings to the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts. At your tables, one group please read 1 Corinthians 12:14-20 and discuss the questions that follow? The second group please read 1 Corinthians 12:21-26 and discuss the questions that follow. Give time for tables to read and discuss, but allow time to review with the whole class.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would

*be the sense of smell?*¹⁸ *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*¹⁹ *If all were a single member, where would the body be?*²⁰ *As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

Discussion Questions:

- What does Paul say about the value of each gift to the body?
- What does Paul imply would happen to the body of Christ if believers refuse to embrace their gifts?
- What does Paul say about God's ability to give gifts?
- What might be behind someone's displeasure over how God has gifted them?

²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*²² *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*²³ *and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,*²⁴ *which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,*²⁵ *that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.*²⁶ *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Discussion Questions:

- What caution does Paul give to those who think their spiritual gifts have made them better than those with seemingly lesser gifts?
- At Grace Church, what spiritual gifts tend to be more visible? And what spiritual gifts seem to be less visible?
- According to verse 25, what is the purpose behind the diversity of the gifts God had given?

ASK **The attitude towards gifts differed in these two passages. Will each group please share what issues Paul was addressing?**

SAY **Will someone from each group please summarize your discussions of these passages?**

We're about to explore the gifts that God gave each of you. As we do this, let's remember Paul's counsel. God gave some of us gifts that might seem insignificant to us. Maybe these gifts don't place us in the limelight. Remember that God is a good gift-giver and that our gifts matter. Paul calls them "indispensable." Some of us might have received a gift that does place us in the center of attention. Paul reminds us that our gift is just that—an undeserved present. Paul also points out that whatever the nature of our own gifts, we are interdependent with people whose gifts are both more visible and less visible than our own. God is working to build unity in the body of believers. Remember, this survey is not the Bible, it is just one tool that can help you discover your gifts.

Give participants time to talk at their tables about the spiritual gifts portion of the SHAPE assessment.

SHAPE Assessment Discussion Questions:

- What surprised you in the spiritual gifts results in your assessment?
- Is God already using one of these gifts in your life and ministry?

Next week you will participate in a ministry tour that will highlight opportunities at Grace to serve. Sometimes, the best way to discover your gifts is to just start serving.

PRAYER: End the session by leading a time of prayer (or ask a volunteer to pray).

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION:

1. Complete The Parable of the Talents devotion in your Participant Guide.
2. Review the Description of the Spiritual Gifts in the Appendix of your Participant Guide. Consider using the scriptures found under your gifts in your devotional and prayer time.
3. Review your SHAPE assessment results and pray over them. Ask God how He wants to use your life as part of His story.

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- In your weekly email, share a portion of your own journey to discover your spiritual gifts as a way to encourage others.
- Also, give a preview of the ministry tour by directing them to view the volunteer form at www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass . (Talk with the Connections Team about logistics for the tour.)
- Pray for the class- that they will discover and use the gifts God has given them to build up the church and bring Him glory!

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Read Matthew 25.

Here's some background information invaluable to help understand this story told by Jesus. The three servants were given the opportunity of a lifetime. Their master entrusted them with managing his estate during a long absence. The monetary unit in the story -- a "talent" -- was worth about 15 years' wages for a slave, so they were each handling more wealth than they could ever hope to accumulate on their own.

Re-read Matthew 25:14-18.

- Based on the master's behavior in these verses, what guesses can we make about his character?
- What do we learn about each servant?

Read Matthew 25:19-30.

- When the master returns to settle his accounts, how does he define success?
- How did the "one talent" servant's attitude toward the master affect his investment strategy?
- How do you think this servant's view of his master came to be so distorted?
- If you were to summarize the main point of this parable in a sentence, what would it be?
- How does this parable speak to the way we handle our gifts and talents today?
- What encouragement does this parable have for those who use their resources for God?

CORE CLASS: SESSION 6

Big Idea: God has made us uniquely to fulfill His purpose.

Key Texts: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”* **Jeremiah 1:5**

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. **John 15:16**

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. **Ephesians 1:4-5**

| | Supplies Needed |
|--|---|
| <p>Introduction (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host. Participants will share insights from Session 5 homework: completing The Parable of the Talents Devotion reading the Description of the Spiritual Gifts praying over SHAPE assessment results.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | Bibles, CORE Participant Guides, pens/pencils, Passion Card Template, cardstock, scissors, poster board or dry-erase board, markers |
| <p>A. Your Ministry Is Determined by your Heart (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will use a special deck of cards to begin to discover their passions.</p> | Participants' SHAPE assessments |
| <p>B. Your Ministry Is Determined by your Abilities (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will explore scriptures about God giving people abilities. Participants will consider the SIGN acronym for identifying their strengths.</p> | |
| <p>C. Your Ministry Is Determined by your Personality (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review the results of the Personality portion of their online SHAPE assessment and discuss how their personalities affect their ministry.</p> | |
| <p>D. Your Ministry Is Determined by your Experiences (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will record four types of experiences they have encountered and reflect on how these events might prepare them for ministry.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | |
| <p>Homework for Next Session (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review homework for the coming week.</p> | |

Presenter Name: _____

Contact Information: _____

GOAL:

Class participants will identify the heart, abilities, personality, and experiences in their lives that shape their personal ministry.

PREPARATION

- Host, review the appendix document for the Ministry Tour. Confirm logistics with Connections Team.
- Teacher, prepare several decks of Passion Cards. You'll need one deck for every four people. To make each deck of cards, print the Passion Cards Template page on a piece of cardstock and cut out the cards with scissors. These may already be available in the CORE resource folder. Check with the host.
- Teacher, print images of a duck, an eagle, a book, a turtle, a horse, and a rabbit to be used in the "abilities" story. These may already be available in the CORE resource folder. Check with the host.
- Teacher, write the SHAPE acronym on poster board or dry-erase board.

FOR THE LEADER

Before or after this session, the Connections Team at your site will conduct a brief tour of your facility, pointing out volunteer opportunities along the way.

This session's curriculum allows time for class participants to reflect, discuss, and grow in their understanding of the type of servant God created them to be.

During this session you will help class participants learn that the way God created them as individuals is an important clue to discovering their personal ministries. God shapes a person's heart, abilities, personality, and experiences in such a way that we are motivated to embrace the ministry God has chosen for us.

Heart in the SHAPE acronym. The word "heart" as used in SHAPE is a synonym for a person's passions and interests. In **Psalm 37:4** we see the beauty of what happens when someone aligns their passions with the things that matter to God:

*Delight yourself in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

In the Old Testament, the heart referred to a person's mind, will, and emotion. The heart was a poetic way to talk about the essence of the human soul.

Abilities in the SHAPE acronym. Abilities are clues that point us toward our ministries. In **Exodus 35:30-36:2**, God tells Moses that He gave Bezalel and Oholiab *skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary*. Therefore, Moses had a unique perspective regarding the source of these two craftsmen's abilities. The neighbors of Oholiab and Bezalel, and perhaps the two men themselves, probably did not view their abilities as particularly spiritual. God, however, saw the abilities He gave them as indispensable for the nation of Israel to worship Him well. Most people do not consider that their natural talents and skills have the potential to build God's kingdom.

Personalities in the SHAPE acronym. God uses our personalities to fit us for the ministry He intends for us. Believers in Christ know that we feel blessed when we are in God's will. It follows, then, that God crafts our personalities to fit the type of service He means for us to do.

Experiences in the SHAPE acronym. God allows us to go through the experiences of our lives – both the positive ones and the negative ones -- so that we can use those experiences in serving and helping others.

INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY **Welcome back to week 6! We covered a lot of ground in session 5. Let's review our homework:**

HOST ASK **Will someone share their thoughts or insights from the Parable of the Talents devotion or the Spiritual Gifts descriptions?**

HOST SAY **This week we'll continue exploring who God has made us to be, that ►God has made us uniquely to fulfill His purpose. First, get into groups and share a few or your SHAPE assessment findings for "HAPE."** Allow participants 5-7 minutes to share at their tables.

HOST SAY **Let's pray and then I'm going to turn the class over to today's presenter _____.**

PRAYER

TEACHER SAY ►**God has made us uniquely to fulfill His purpose.** So, we're looking again today at the SHAPE acronym. Last week we looked at the "S" for spiritual gifts. We read Scripture verses about Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts, and each of us began to explore what our own gifts are. That's the proper starting place for discovering the ministry God has prepared for each of us. But just knowing our spiritual gifts is not enough. Other aspects of how God created us often come into play in our personal ministry.

Let's say, for example, that you are a gifted administrator and that you volunteered to provide organizational help for ServErie. It's possible for you to do an excellent job administratively but not feel fulfilled in that role. Why? Because your passion might lie more strongly in working with children, rather than in social justice concerns. Your spiritual gifts determine what you *do*. The next four parts of the SHAPE acronym help provide the setting of where you will best serve, the people you will serve, and the people you will serve with.

A. YOUR MINISTRY IS DETERMINED BY YOUR HEART

SAY The letter "H" stands for **Heart**. When we talk about the "heart" for SHAPE purposes, we are talking about **passion**. In our culture, the word "heart" is synonymous with passion. The word "passion" brings to mind love and enthusiasm. So when we talk about the heart, we're talking about passion. (When the Bible talks about "the heart," it's referring to the seat of human personality.)

Physiologically, every human being has a unique heartbeat. Our hearts pump blood in similar, but distinct, patterns. Likewise, God has given each of us a unique emotional "heartbeat" that races when we encounter the activities, subjects, or circumstances that interest us. We instinctively feel deeply about some things, but not so strongly about other things.

This God-given motivation serves as an internal guidance system for our lives. It determines what our interests are and what will bring us the most satisfaction and fulfillment. It also motivates us to pursue certain activities, subjects, and environments.

However, you are probably not surprised that the Bible teaches that our emotions can be deceitful. We all know we have the capacity to want the wrong things and then to invent reasons that justify them. But the Bible promises us this:

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

Amazingly, the Bible teaches that, as we learn to delight ourselves in God, God gives us the things we desire! This sounds odd to many people. Some people think like this:

"If I like to do it, it must not be God's will.

God's will must be something that's miserable.

If I really enjoy it, if I really desire it, it couldn't be God's will; in fact, it must be sin."

Nothing could be farther from the truth. God gave you your inborn interests. Are you passionate about music? That came from God. Are you passionate about carpentry? God gave you that passion.

ASK class participants to get into groups of four or five. Give each group a deck of Passion Cards.

ASK each group to put their cards face down on the table.

SAY The special deck of cards in front of you contains questions that will help you get in touch with your passions. Take turns picking up a card and answering the question. For some people, this exercise will seem easy. For other people, identifying your passions might be a struggle.

[Give the groups 8-10 minutes to answer the questions on the Passion Cards.]

SAY If you feel like you can identify your passions, write them in your Participant Guide. If you aren't sure you can identify your passions, the questions from the cards are in the Appendix of your Participant Guide. Take some time this next week to pray and journal, to get in touch with your passions.

Remember, ►God has made us uniquely to fulfill His purpose. The choice you have is whether to honor **God** or to honor **yourself** with your passions.

B. YOUR MINISTRY IS DETERMINED BY YOUR ABILITIES

SAY The letter "A" stands for **Abilities**. I'd like to read you a short story about abilities. I guess I should say it is kind of a short sad story.

Read the story below. Tape the pictures to the poster board as they are referenced.

The animals had a school. The curriculum consisted of running, climbing, flying and swimming. All the animals took all the subjects. The *duck* was good at swimming and fair in flying, but he was terrible in running. So he was made to drop the swimming class and stay after school to practice running. He kept this up until he was only average at swimming but average was acceptable. The others, including the teacher, were no longer threatened by the duck's swimming abilities so everyone felt more comfortable, except the duck.

The *eagle* was considered to be a problem student. For instance, in climbing class, he could beat all the others to the top of the tree but he insisted on using his own method of getting there. He had to be severely disciplined and finally, because of his non-cooperation in swimming, he was expelled for insubordination.

The *rabbit* started at the top of the class in running, but obviously he was inadequate in other areas. Because of so much make up work in swimming, he had a nervous breakdown and had to drop out of school.

The *turtle* was a failure in almost every course offered. His shell was considered to be the leading cause of his failure so it was removed. This did help his running a bit, but sadly he became the first casualty when he was stepped on by the *horse*.

The faculty was disappointed but, all in all, it was a good school in humility. There were no real successes. No one seemed to measure up to the others, but they did concentrate on their weak points and some progress was made.

ASK

- What makes this story absurd?
- Have you ever been aware of this kind of thinking in a church setting?
- Was any damage caused by expecting everyone to excel in a select handful of abilities?

SAY The good news is that God creates masterpieces, not cogs in a wheel. We're all uniquely handcrafted by God. The apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome in the 12th chapter of Romans, verse 6:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...

In 1 Corinthians 12:6, Paul said,

and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

We tend to focus on a narrow set of gifts and abilities in the church. We celebrate people who can teach or sing or facilitate life groups. These abilities have obvious spiritual applications. But **all** abilities are God-given and able to **build up** the church.

ASK Would someone volunteer to read Exodus 31:1-11 aloud for us?

The LORD said to Moses, ² "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶ And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ⁷ the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, ⁸ the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, ⁹ and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, ¹⁰ and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, ¹¹ and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do."

SAY Bezalel and Oholiab did not learn how to work with gold or stone in a church. They probably didn't view their abilities as particularly spiritual. But that's not how God viewed them.

ASK

- How did God describe the source of their abilities?
- How did their so-called “non-spiritual” abilities improve the quality of the entire nation’s spiritual life?
- What are some abilities that you possess that don’t seem particularly “spiritual?”

SAY Marcus Buckingham, a popular writer, uses the S I G N acronym to help people identify if something is one of their strengths.

- “S” is for **success**.
When you’ve engaged in a certain activity, did you have success at it?
Do other people tell you that you have a gift for it?
- “I” is for **instinct**.
Does the behavior that the activity requires come naturally to you?
Do you do it frequently and is it almost a gut instinct?
- “G” is for **growth**.
Did you pick this activity up quickly?
Are you naturally looking for ways to grow in it?
- “N” is for **need**.
Do you have a need to exercise this ability?
Do you think about it often?
Are you unhappy if you aren’t able to exercise the ability?

SAY In your Participant Guide list all of your abilities in the box.

[Allow two minutes for writing.]

SAY You’ve just touched the tip of the iceberg. God has given you a number of abilities, in addition to your spiritual gifts, that will determine where and how you can serve best in a local church.

C. YOUR MINISTRY IS DETERMINED BY YOUR PERSONALITY

SAY The “P” in the SHAPE acronym stands for **Personality**. Let’s try a quick activity to get us thinking about how our personalities help determine our ministry fit. Look at your Participant Guide. Write your name in cursive in the box. [Pause.] Now quickly write your name with your opposite hand in the same box.

ASK

- How did you feel when you attempted to write with your opposite hand?
- How was your efficiency when you wrote with your opposite hand?
- How did the results look?

This is just another example of why we need to pay close attention to the way God made us. If we pay attention to our unique personalities, we will be better able to serve God in a way that just feels natural.

When you took the SHAPE online assessment, the test measured a few things about your personality.

1. Do you prefer to work with people or tasks?

Individuals who are people-oriented tend to enjoy working with teams of people.

Task-oriented people tend to be more introverted and capable of working alone.

2. Do you prefer working in a fast-paced setting, or do you prefer a slower, more methodical pace?

ASK class participants to share the SHAPE findings regarding their personalities in groups of two or three.

[Give them several minutes to do this.]

D. YOUR MINISTRY IS DETERMINED BY YOUR EXPERIENCES

Your unique makeup determines your ministry, and your experiences are a major factor in shaping your make up.

SAY The “E” in the SHAPE acronym stands for **Experiences**. Let’s look at four types of experience God uses.

1. **Spiritual Experiences**

SAY Theologian Miroslav Volf identified a pattern of “ascending, then descending” that’s repeated throughout Scripture. Moses climbed Mount Sinai and heard from God, before he returned to the Israelites and gave them the Ten Commandments and more of the law. Jesus ascended the Mount of Transfiguration, and then He returned to mend a sin-torn world. Jesus ascended to Heaven, and He will return one more time to make all things right.

Sometimes God uses “mountain-top” experiences to draw us closer to Him. We hear from God in a meaningful spiritual experience, and then we re-engage with our world in rich, creative ministry.

Think through your life. When have you felt closest to God? Maybe it was when you committed your life to Christ, or when you were baptized, or when you had devotional times with your family. Maybe you attended a conference, a revival or a seminar that was life-changing. Write in your Participant Guide the time(s) you felt closest to God.

[After several minutes, give class participants time to share their experiences with a partner.]

2. **Educational Experiences**

SAY Before Moses ruled Israel, God placed him in the Egyptian royal palace where he was educated as a prince. The apostle Paul mastered the Old Testament books of the Law and the Prophets during his schooling as a Pharisee. Some of Jesus’ disciples had informal vocational training as fishermen.

Whatever school you went to, whatever diploma or degree you may have earned, your education has shaped your skills, interests, and outlook on the world. In the space provided in your Participant Guide, write down your favorite educational experiences.

3. **Ministry Experiences**

SAY Your past ministry experiences are an invaluable tool to help you understand your ministry fit. Some of those experiences might have been fulfilling, while others felt draining. It is crucial that you experiment vigorously as you look for your ministry fit. In your Participant Guide, record your church volunteer history, the best you can remember it. But don’t feel uncomfortable if you’re new to this whole church thing. You can

use this time to write down some volunteer opportunities you've noticed at Grace Church that look interesting to you.

[Give a few moments for everyone to write.]

Now put a plus sign next to the ministry experiences that left you feeling "fruitful and fulfilled." Put a minus sign next to those that were draining or drudgery to you.

[Give a few moments for everyone to write – and to share with a partner if there is time.]

Your past ministry experiences can provide you with valuable insights about your ministry fit. You probably learned something about the type of team you enjoy serving on, the people you enjoy serving with, and something about your abilities and gifts. So even if that ministry placement didn't seem successful at the time, you now have the opportunity to use that experience to learn more about your SHAPE.

TEACHER TIP:

Be sensitive to the fact that some of the negative experiences might be due to reasons other than the gift not matching the ministry. It's possible there was conflict between a volunteer and a ministry leader. Use your discretion as you help your class uncover the reality behind a poor match.

4. Painful Experiences

SAY The problems, hurts, and trials we've endured have taught us valuable lessons. It can be difficult to admit personal struggles, but we're most effective in relating to others when we're willing to talk about our struggles. Weakness is one of the few things that everyone has in common.

Since our greatest life messages come out of our weaknesses, not our strengths, we should pay close attention to what we've learned in the "school of hard knocks." God never wastes a hurt! He wants us to be willing to minister to people who are going through what we've already gone through!

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 is a wonderful passage:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The Bible says God actually allows us to go through difficult situations, circumstances, problems, trials, and difficulties. He comforts and teaches us in those situations, so that we can turn around and minister to other people who are going through situations we've been through.

Who can relate better to someone who has an alcohol problem than somebody who's been an alcoholic?
Who can better relate to someone who's going through a divorce than someone who's been divorced?
Who can better relate to someone who's recently lost a spouse than someone who's lost a husband or wife?
God wants us to look at all of our hard, sad experiences, to see how we can use them to help someone else.

Take a second and write down a word or symbol that represents a painful experience that you've endured. Please know that we respect your privacy and we're not going to ask you to share this with anyone. That type of disclosure is something you can choose to share or not share as you wish.

[Give the class a few moments to write.]

SAY God uses all four categories of life experiences to mold us to be effective in serving Him and others:
spiritual experiences,
educational experiences,
ministry experiences, and
painful experiences.

As we pay close attention to what's happening in our lives, we become better able to set the course of our future in ministry.

PRAYER: End the session by leading a time of prayer (or ask a volunteer to pray).

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION:

Devotions:

1. Ten Truths About Spiritual Gifts
 - Read "Ten Truths about Spiritual Gifts" on the following page.
 - Write your impressions of each Scripture passage in the space provided.
2. Reflect on the following questions and write down your responses in your Participant Guide.
 - How do you picture the use of the spiritual gifts God has given you?
 - Why is it important for people who are part of a church to actively use their spiritual gifts?
3. Pray. Talk with God about your use of your spiritual gifts. Journal your thoughts in your Participant Guide.

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- Ministry Tour Follow-Up: Participants should receive an email/call this week from a ministry lead in the areas where they are interested in serving. Please ask them to let you know if they do not receive a contact or if they would like guidance in this area.
- Confirm session eight details with Site Pastor and let participants know what to expect. Also, connect with E site lead about inviting all teachers to this session.

TEN TRUTHS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Look up the following verses in your Bible. Write in the space following each passage a phrase or a thought that seems especially meaningful to you.

1. Gifts are not for the benefit of the person receiving them. **1 Peter 4:10** and **1 Corinthians 12:7**
2. Gifts are given to provide unity and maturity in the body. **Ephesians 4:11** and **13-14**
3. Every Christian has at least one gift. **1 Corinthians 12:7**
4. No one receives all the gifts. **1 Corinthians 12:27-30**
5. No single gift is given to everyone. **1 Corinthians 12:29-30**
6. You can't earn a spiritual gift. **Ephesians 4:7**
7. The Holy Spirit decides what gifts I get. **1 Corinthians 12:11**
8. I am to develop the gifts God gives me. **1 Timothy 4:14**
9. It's a sin to waste the gifts God gave me. **1 Corinthians 4:1-2**
10. Using my gifts glorifies God and grows me. **John 15:8**

PASSION CARD QUESTIONS

What makes you smile?

What would you do for free?

What do you find easy?

What sparks your creativity?

What do you like to talk about?

What would you regret having not tried?

What makes you unafraid of failure?

CORE CLASS: SESSION 7

Big Idea: We grow in our faith by taking next steps.

Key Text: *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:13-14

| | Supplies Needed |
|--|---|
| <p>Introduction (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host. Participants will review Session 6 homework: Ten Truths about Spiritual Gifts</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | <p>CORE Participant Guides, Bibles, pens/pencils, poster of Next Steps Pathway, L.I.V.E. banners if available</p> |
| <p>A. A Look at Our Pathway (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will receive an overview of the Next Steps Pathway.</p> | <p>TV, DVD player, "Next Steps" DVD</p> |
| <p>B. Next Steps Activities: L.I.V.E. (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review what L.I.V.E. represents.</p> | |
| <p>C. Live in Community (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will discuss scriptures that provide this direction for believers. Participants will understand the importance of Life Groups at Grace Church: their structure, how to join one, and how L.I.V.E. activities are organized within Life Groups.</p> | |
| <p>D. While We're on the Next Steps Pathway (up to 15 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of pastors and staff in the Grace Church community • Care and Support ministry • How to get more information about L.I.V.E. activities • The role of Site Pastor Teams <p>Prayer.</p> | |
| <p>Homework for Next Session (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review the assignments for the upcoming week.</p> | |

GOALS

1. Participants will understand the Next Steps Pathway.
2. Participants will know the meaning of L.I.V.E.
3. Participants will learn the importance of Life Groups.
4. Participants will be encouraged to join a Life Group.
5. Participants will understand the role of pastors and staff in the Grace Church community.
6. Participants will know how to access assistance for Care and Support, Next Steps, and Site Pastors

FOR THE LEADER

During this session you will introduce participants to the Next Steps Pathway. The Next Steps Pathway is Grace Church's model for explaining how people can move from spiritual newness to spiritual maturity in Christ. The biblical concept for spiritual growth is called "discipleship." We know the path toward Christ is not the same for everyone. Nobody walks a path that has no trials and tribulations.

Despite our different life experiences, the Next Steps Pathway describes the most common trajectory of people's paths at Grace Church. Connection events start the journey, classes deepen our understanding of the many aspects of living in community at Grace Church, and then joining and participating in a Life Group make the learning experiential.

Every believer needs to:

**LIVE in Community,
INVEST in Others,
VOLUNTEER Your Time, and
EQUIP Yourself to grow in your relationship with Jesus.**

At Grace Church, we believe it is the role of the church to provide structure and support for believers to L.I.V.E. Structure and support to L.I.V.E. are provided primarily through a network of small groups known at Grace Church as Life Groups. Life Groups at Grace are important because they are designed to help people mature as believers in Christ. As people mature in their Christian life, they incorporate L.I.V.E. in their daily faith walk, both independently and with their Life Group brothers and sisters.

Grace Church does not assume responsibility for anyone's spiritual life, because each of us has that responsibility ourselves. Grace Church does embrace the important role of staff supports, teachers, helpers, and motivators. Our motto is: "You can do it...we can help." Additional supports are in place for people who are in need, hurting, or in special circumstances. The Care and Support ministry team coordinates those activities.

Because we want people to take responsibility for finding out what is going on at Grace, the information is available in a number of ways. The primary information tool is our website, in conjunction with the Next Steps Center located in the atrium of each church location. The Site Pastor Team at each location also serves as a valuable resource. They have "shepherds' hearts," with a passion to care for people and to help them get connected into the family of Grace Church and, most importantly, connected into the family of God.

PREPARATION

HOST, before the class session, assist the Teacher in setting up the DVD player and TV/projector.

TEACHER, check with HOST before class about who in the class is in a Life Group (you will be asking them to share their experience).

HOST INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY I hope you were able to complete the Spiritual Truths devotion this past week. Let's share how these truths and scriptures impacted our thinking about spiritual gifts.

[Allow about 5 minutes for class participants to share about their homework.]

HOST SAY We've covered so much material in the last 6 weeks. Today, we want to encourage you with our big idea: ►we grow in our faith by taking next steps. No one has arrived, our relationship with Christ is a journey, one step at a time, as He leads. Today, _____ is going to give us a guide of possible next steps.

PRAYER

A. A LOOK AT OUR PATHWAY

TEACHER, Direct the attention of class participants to the Next Steps Pathway illustration in their Participant Guide.

TEACHER SAY In past sessions, we have explored the vision and mission of Grace Church. [Session 1] These are non-negotiables. Marching orders that came from Jesus Himself! We also have looked at the core values of Grace Church, our attempt to describe the type of community we believe God is calling us to be, as we follow our vision.

We also have talked about being “fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.” It would be great if that happened just by *wanting* to be close to God. But the Bible tells us that becoming like Jesus involves our personal commitment plus our ongoing actions that keep us moving, step by step, closer to God.

Being a fully-devoted follower of Jesus is more than a one-time decision – it is a lifelong process. Some churches call it “discipleship.” At Grace Church it is called the **Next Steps Pathway**. So we call the actions we take to get closer to God our “Next Steps” -- because ► **we grow in our faith by taking next steps!** The Next Steps Pathway visually represents a progression of next steps. These steps make up an effective, yet flexible, structure through which we can each grow more and more like Christ. Let’s walk through each step of the pathway and please jump in if you have any questions.

1. Invite Others

First, many of us may have come to Grace because someone invited us. Maybe we already had a relationship with Jesus, or maybe that was our first step toward Him. Either way, if you’ve been invited you know the power of an invitation!

2. Come Experience

For most of us, our first experience with Grace Church is a Sunday morning worship experience. Maybe a friend invited you. While the services are designed primarily to be an environment that inspires believers to worship God, they are also intended to be understandable for people exploring faith, as well as people at the beginning of their walk with the Lord.

4. Connect

Next, people are invited to a Connection Point event where they can meet site pastors and ministry leaders, and ask questions. At the event, everyone is encouraged to take the 8-week CORE class, which you are participating in at this very moment!

5. Attend CORE

First of all, this class was created to help people get to know the basics of the Christian faith and the basics about Grace Church! Also, we encourage everyone to begin experiencing the Grace Church community by taking CORE. The class connects newcomers with other people, so newcomers can begin to make friends.

6. Join a Life Group

We believe the best way to become fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ is to grow together with other Christians in a Life Group. Becoming part of a Life Group is the natural next step after CORE. A Life Group is a small group of believers who meet regularly, perhaps weekly or every other week, for the purpose of accountability and spiritual growth. Everyone is encouraged to join a Life Group. We’ll talk more about Life Groups toward the end of today’s session.

7. Learn to Lead

We will not reach the peak of our individual spiritual journey until we are in heaven at home with the Lord. Till then, all of us can keep growing closer to God and keep becoming more like Christ. For most of us, at some point our spiritual journey takes us forward into leadership. Maybe we will help people who are just beginning their Christian walk. Maybe God will direct us into some form of organized leadership in ministry. Some of us think we do not have the spiritual gift of leadership, but experts tell us that leadership is simply bringing about change by the effect of our own influence on others. If leadership is influence, then all Christians are leaders, because we are all called to influence someone – from our kids, to a neighbor, to a co-worker. So a logical Next Step for us is to reach out to other people.

8. Invite Others

On our Next Steps journey we invite others to church and into relationship with Jesus. We remain outward focused.

9. Make and Be

The outward arrow from the Next Steps Pathway represents our individual and combined impact on the world outside of Grace Church, as we demonstrate the love of Jesus by the way we live in our homes, workplaces, and communities. God calls us to make and be fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

SAY Remember that the goal is not to take all of the Next Steps perfectly or even in order – the idea is that **▶we grow in our faith by taking next steps**. The Next Steps Pathway is an organizational guide that we think helps us make and be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

B. NEXT STEPS ACTIVITIES: L.I.V.E.

[Keep this section brief!]

SAY The Next Steps Pathway shows us a picture of where people can go next at Grace Church. It might be from a worship experience to a reception, from there to a class, then on to a group, and so forth. But the Next Steps Pathway does not tell us *how* to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

So we searched the Bible to find out what we could do to make and be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. We found in the Bible people throughout history who lived lives of full devotion to Christ. And we found some common themes in our investigation.

There seemed to be four main categories of action to take, summed up by the acronym L.I.V.E. We've been exploring parts of this acronym each week so let's review them.

SAY Let's start with "L" – This is the one we're really going to explore in depth today. It stands for **LIVE** in Community. Jesus saves people into a worldwide community of believers. It is impossible for a follower of Christ to thrive in isolation.

What does Hebrews 10:24-25 tell us about our role and responsibility in Christian friendships?

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Hebrews 10:24-25

ASK Who remembers what the "I" stands for?

SAY The “I” is for **INVEST** in Others. In sessions 3 and 4 we learned how to share our faith stories and how we can be a part of renewing and restoring the world. The church-wide, community-wide INVEST activity that Grace Church began is **ServErie**.

SAY The “V” is for **VOLUNTEER** Your Time. We learned in sessions 5 and 6 that using our God-given abilities and spiritual gifts to serve others is how God builds us up and refreshes our spirits. Serving was never intended to be drudgery or reluctant obedience. God’s design was to inspire and refresh us as we serve!

SAY In session 2 we learned that the “E”-stands for **EQUIP** Yourself.

ASK Who remembers the two disciplines that we learned about in session 2?

SAY L.I.V.E. is not a collection of programs. The acronym represents a **lifestyle** of **following Jesus**. The programs Grace Church offers and the steps on our pathway are intended to help you get started and then keep you going! Furthermore, L.I.V.E. is a lifestyle – not a check list of activities that overwhelm us each week. When we are open to living like Jesus, we become aware of opportunities for spiritual growth that we never even noticed before.

C. LIVE IN COMMUNITY

SAY Okay let’s go back to the “L” – it stands for LIVE in Community. Gathering together to encourage and support each other contributes greatly to our spiritual health. God never intended for us to struggle through life alone. Scripture is full of examples of times God provided a friend or a family member just when someone most needed support. David turned to his friend Jonathan during tough times. When Naomi lost her husband and sons, she leaned on her daughter-in-law Ruth. And even Jesus, when He felt anxious about going to the cross, asked his three closest friends – Peter, James and John – to come pray with Him.

SAY Let’s read some verses to see what the Bible says about living in community with other believers in Christ.

[Assign one or two Scripture passages to each table.]

SAY Have someone at your table read your Scripture passages aloud, and as you read along, underline in your Participant Guide some of the ways that living in Christian community helps us grow. Then discuss the questions and share your ideas.

[Allow about 5 minutes for this activity and then invite the groups to share their answers.]

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. **Acts 2:44-47**

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **Hebrews 10:24-25**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction,
 with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up
 his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!*
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. **John 13:35**

*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly
 affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the
 Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the
 saints and seek to show hospitality.* **Romans 12:9-13**

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do
 not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that
 you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For*

*“Whoever desires to love life
 and see good days,
 let him keep his tongue from evil
 and his lips from speaking deceit;
¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good;
 let him seek peace and pursue it.
¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
 and his ears are open to their prayer.
 But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*

1 Peter 3:8-12

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.
⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one
 another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's
 varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the
 strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong
 glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* **1 Peter 4:7-11**

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the ways we see in these verses that friendships help us grow?
- Why do we especially need Christian friends?

Say Let's face it—we need each other. And that's just what God had in mind! At Grace we feel that Sunday morning is just a first step toward Christian community. As our Next Steps pathway shows, we really want every Grace attender to be part of a Life Group. But we know that there are often things that hold us back

from joining. Share with others at your table some of the barriers that might keep you or others from being in a Life Group. Talk about how you might overcome some of those barriers.

[Allow about 5 minutes for discussion. Invite tables to share ideas.]

ASK Would someone here share a moment about what your Life Group means to you?

[If there are no volunteers, please share your personal experience and/or invite the HOST to share.]

Say We have talked about Life Groups in several CORE sessions. Perhaps, at the end of this CORE class, several of you will join together to form a new Life Group. We will help you get started. Some of you may even be ready to lead a Life Group, so be praying about that.

D. WHILE WE'RE ON THE NEXT STEPS PATHWAY

SAY: There are four ways Grace Church offers help to people as they are taking their Next Steps.

1. First of all, there are **pastors** and **staff** in the Grace Church community to equip you along the way. Let's watch a video by Pastor Derek Sanford to explore how we can best understand the role of the pastors and staff in our church community.

Play the "NEXT STEPS" DVD (7 minutes long).

ASK

- What would you say are the responsibilities of the leaders at Grace, based on this video?
- In what ways are people at Grace Church responsible for their own spiritual growth?

2. A second way Grace Church can help people take their Next Step is by offering **Care** and **Support** to hurting individuals. There's a group of people here led by Pastor Mike Watson who provide help in numerous ways. See what Pastor Mike has to say about the Care and Support ministry and find a list of the support groups that meet at Grace by going to our website: <http://whoisgrace.com/gethelp/>

3. Third, information about Grace Church L.I.V.E. activities is available from a variety of sources:

- Ask your Life Group Leader
- Visit [whoisgrace.com/next steps](http://whoisgrace.com/next-steps)
- Visit the Next Steps Center at your Grace Church location on Sunday mornings
- Check the program you receive when you enter the Worship Center
- Like Grace Church on Facebook.

4. Last, but certainly not least, there is a Site Pastor **Team** at every Grace location to help people take their Next Steps. These folks may not be theologians, but they are people with shepherding hearts whose ministry is to love you. Any one of them would gladly talk with you one-on-one about what you need and how to find help. Their names and contact information are in the Appendix of your Participant Guide.

SAY We covered a lot of material today! To help you remember the high points, the first homework assignment is designed to give you a review on the Grace Church website. Also, spend time praying about your own Life Group participation.

Prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION:

Review on the website:

- a. Read the story of Grace Church at <http://whoisgrace.com/about/our-story/>
- b. Go to <http://whoisgrace.com/nextsteps/> and check out the group finder tab under the Live in Community section.
- c. Go to <http://whoisgrace.com> and click on the full calendar to explore the activities happening at Grace.
- d. Review Grace Church's bylaws at <http://whoisgrace.com/about/get-to-know-us/>.

Read the Statement of Faith found in the Appendix and watch the Statement of Faith video from Pastor Derek Sanford at www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass.

- What are some questions you have after hearing the Statement of Faith?
- Which faith statement are you most passionate about and hold tightly to?
- How would you summarize the Statement of Faith?
- Think on the faith statements. If we believe them to be non-negotiable, how should they affect our actions?

Devotion:

Pray about being in a Life Group. Ask God to confirm His desire in you to live your faith with other Christians. Ask God to connect you with a group that is relaxed and enjoyable. Ask God to show you a group where you can help others, as well as learn from them.

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- In your email this week, ask participants to indicate to you if they are interested in joining a life group or if they might want to lead one. Let your L site lead and/or Connections lead know if someone wants to get in a group.
- Remind participants of the details of the session eight meal with the Site Pastor.
- Attach a copy of the evaluation form to the email and allow participants to fill it out and email it back to you, or print and fill it out. You will also have copies for them at session eight.
- Let participants know that they will receive an invitation to apply electronically for membership if they have attended six sessions of CORE. Membership is optional of course! If they decide to pursue membership, an interview will be set up with two members of staff.

CORE CLASS: SESSION 8

Big Idea: Following Christ means allowing Him to change us.

Key Text: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 3:18

| | Supplies Needed |
|--|---|
| <p>Introduction (up to 5 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will check in with the CORE Host.</p> <p>Participants will review homework from Session 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reading about Grace Church on website; watching the Statement of Faith video; praying about being in a Life Group. <p>Prayer.</p> | CORE Participant Guides, Bibles, pens/pencils |
| <p>A. Seven Life-Changing Statements (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will review the seven big ideas covered in CORE sessions so far and reflect on how these ideas impact their lives.</p> | |
| <p>B. Three Experiences that Indicate Ongoing Change (up to 15 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will explore baptism, generosity and tithing, and accountability; and consider why these experiences are important to a Christ-follower.</p> | |
| <p>C. Statement of Faith / Leadership Structure (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will understand the importance of the Grace Church Statement of Faith and the strength of the multi-site leadership structure.</p> | |
| <p>D. Significance of Membership (up to 10 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will understand the value and expectations of church membership.</p> | |
| <p>E. Q & A with Site Pastor (up to 20 minutes)</p> <p>Participants will have an opportunity to ask any questions they may have.</p> <p>Participants will be invited to begin the membership process.</p> <p>Prayer.</p> | Evaluation forms |

Site Pastor/Presenter: _____

Contact Information: _____

GOALS:

1. Participants will understand the benefits of pursuing spiritual growth in the context of community.
2. Participants will be familiar with the Grace Church Statement of Faith and the multi-site leadership structure.
3. Participants will understand the commitment embodied in Grace Church membership.
4. Participants will be given an opportunity to have their questions about Grace Church answered.

PREPARATION

- HOST, provide copies of the Class Evaluation Form to those who have not already completed it. Please return these completed forms to your EQUIP site lead.
- SITE PASTOR, coordinate plans for your meal! Please make sure it is billed to EQUIP-Central.

FOR THE LEADER

As we've talked about in an earlier session, Grace Church has a healthy acceptance of needed change, and we have our own storied history of change. Visit whoisgrace.com/about to learn more about this history of change.

We want class participants to have a comprehensive understanding of what becoming members of Grace Church will mean for them. God-honoring, gospel-centered change takes place as Grace Church obeys Christ's call to advance His kingdom.

In addition to change, other topics that will be covered in this final CORE session are:

- **Baptism:** Every person coming into membership at Grace Church is expected to have been baptized at an age when they were old enough to understand what they were doing. Jesus commands baptism for believers, as an outward demonstration of an inward spiritual reality.
- **Generosity and Tithing:** While tithing (giving 10% of one's income) is not a strict membership requirement, Grace Church upholds it as a Biblical goal that growing Christ-followers should be striving toward.
- **Accountability:** Jesus presented a model for His followers to correct and restore each other. He prescribed meeting with an offending party first in private, then gradually moving more insistently toward reconciliation and repentance, with the guidance of church staff and elders. Sadly, a person who remains unrepentant must be removed from relationship with the body of believers at Grace Church as a way to warn that person about the serious, sinful condition of their spiritual life.

- **Statement of Faith:** During the week, class participants will have viewed an online video of Pastor Derek Sanford discussing the Statement of Faith. Any questions can be brought up at the Q&A with the Site Pastor at the end of the session.

INTRODUCTION

HOST SAY **Welcome to our last session of CORE!**

HOST ASK

- **During your prayer time this past week, have you felt God pulling your heart toward Life Groups in any way?**
- **How would you describe the Grace Church Statement of Faith, after watching the video by Pastor Derek?**

HOST SAY **During this last session we will take a look at some essential elements of life at Grace Church. At the end of this session, you will be able to ask any question you might have and our presenter, Site Pastor _____, will be available to answer those questions. If you are interested in becoming a member of Grace Church, you will receive that information as well. If you think of a question later, feel free to email me.**

PRAYER

A. SEVEN LIFE-CHANGING STATEMENTS

SITE PASTOR SAY **You've probably noticed that each week CORE focused on one "Big Idea." Hopefully, every person who calls Grace Church their home church will understand and embrace all seven of these big ideas:**

1. **Maturing Christians participate in a local church.**
2. **Following Christ includes reading His Word and talking to Him in prayer.**
3. **We each have a faith story to share, which is part of God's story.**
4. **We are ambassadors for Christ.**
5. **God designed each of us for a personal ministry.**
6. **God has made us uniquely to fulfill his purpose.**
7. **We grow in our faith by taking next steps.**

Take a moment now and consider:

- **Which of the seven big ideas have you incorporated into your life the most so far? Place a star next to that statement.**
- **Which big idea presents the greatest opportunity for your own personal growth? Circle that one!**

SAY Each one of these seven big ideas points to today's big idea: **Following Christ means allowing Him to change us.** And when our entire church community embraces these big ideas, each person's individual spiritual growth accelerates. During the first CORE session, we looked at why someone should join a local church. The answer? **To change and to become more like Christ.**

SAY This change to be ever more like Christ is an essential part of the mission of Grace Church. Does someone remember what that is? [wait for a volunteer] As a church, we not only want to support people starting a relationship with Jesus, we also want to encourage people who are growing as His followers. Christ-followers continually take **next steps** in their faith, and they experience recognizable change in their lives.

When we are in relationship with Christ, we are loved and accepted just as we are. But God wants to transform our lives -- He loves us enough to not leave us as we are. He changes us for His glory, for the sake of the church, and for our own good.

The early church embraced change for the sake of others. And as you read through the history of Grace Church, you discovered that believers made real sacrifices so that today you and I could be right here, right now. Those believers did not know us, but they prayed for us. They used their resources for us. They gave of themselves for us. Now we get to do the same thing for someone else.

B. THREE EXPERIENCES THAT INDICATE ONGOING CHANGE

SAY Today we are going to explore three experiences that can impact your life and grow your faith. These experiences are integral to our lives as believers at Grace Church.

[Divide the class into three groups.]

SAY In your Participant Guide, you will find three experiences. Group 1 will read and discuss together the BAPTISM section. Group 2 will read and discuss the GENEROSITY & TITHING section. And Group 3 will read and discuss the ACCOUNTABILITY section.

After you have had time to read and discuss your section as a group, we will ask someone from your group to read your section aloud to the whole class and then share your thoughts.

BAPTISM: DISCUSS WITH YOUR GROUP

- What similarities does the apostle Paul see between Jesus' death and resurrection and baptism?
- What does Paul mean when he writes that we (believers) participate in Jesus' death and resurrection?
- How does being connected to Jesus affect how we relate to sin?

GENEROSITY and TITHING: DISCUSS WITH YOUR GROUP

- According to the apostle Paul, how does generous giving change the life of the person who receives the gift?
- How does generous giving change the life of the giver?
- How does generous giving change how God is viewed?

ACCOUNTABILITY: DISCUSS WITH YOUR GROUP

- Think about a time when a friend or spouse told you a hard truth about yourself. How did you feel at that moment? How did you think about that conversation a week later?
- When someone sins, who does Jesus say needs to be involved in the correcting process?
- Why do you think Jesus described a process with “steps?”
- What is the most important characteristic of accountability?

Allow the groups eight to ten minutes to work. Then ask someone from each group to read their section aloud and then share their group’s thoughts. After all three groups share,

ASK:

- **Why are all three of these experiences necessary for the health of the entire church?**
- **Which of these experiences makes you the most uncomfortable? Why?**
- **How can each one of these experiences make a positive change in anyone who practices them?**

SAY **Following Christ means allowing Him to change us;** at Grace Church change includes these three experiences:

Baptism -- a requirement for membership -- brings joy to every believer who is baptized. We practice **generosity** together, and we ask everyone who becomes a Grace Church member to make a commitment to work toward the goal of **tithing**. And finally, we believe that **accountability** should be happening all the time in the church. In Life Groups, believers hold each other accountable to Christ-like living, in the context of loving, grace-filled relationships.

C. STATEMENT OF FAITH/LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

SAY We have talked a lot about different ways we allow Jesus to change us. Let’s take a moment to look at something that will not change -- the core doctrines of Grace Church.

Every church is accountable to God to clearly present the truth of God’s Word. Grace Church has a Statement of Faith document that describes the **truth of Scripture** on which we cannot compromise. You have that document in the Appendix of your Participant Guide. And if you have not yet had a chance to watch the Statement of Faith video on the Grace Church website, please make time to do so -- especially if you decide to pursue membership.

There are doctrinal positions that Christians *can* disagree with. In fact, several of those differences show up among the Grace Church staff, yet we function together very well.

Grace Church is a **safe place** to explore Christian faith -- and even to have significant doubts. You will not be judged for disagreements or uncertainty. However, at Grace Church we do believe that truth matters. Membership matters. Members serve and lead the congregation, so how those members view God and His truth matters. If you cannot accept the Statement of Faith of Grace Church as true, you are welcome to continue to attend, but you cannot become a member.

People who want to become members of Grace Church will be asked during their membership interview if they agree with the Statement of Faith without reservation. If you have questions, doubts, or disagreements with any part of the Statement of Faith, please let us know, so that we can talk with you about those issues.

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

SAY Another important part of getting to know Grace Church is understanding our leadership structure. You probably know by now that as a **multi-site** church -- one church in multiple locations -- we do not have a traditional model of leadership.

We have a Lead Pastor -- Pastor Derek Sanford -- who is supported and accountable to an elected Board of **Elders**. The Elders, along with the Lead Team, assure the successful execution of God's vision for Grace Church.

Our Central team helps support all Grace Church locations in carrying out the church's mission and vision.

Each site has a Site Pastor who shepherds the congregation at that location and leads the Site Staff there. The Site Staff is made up of mostly volunteers. Each Site Pastor is also supported by a Site Pastor Team that helps him shepherd his congregation.

This leadership structure allows Grace Church to multiply the gifts and resources it has been entrusted with, so as to reach people in many different communities with the gospel and to equip those people to serve and lead in Christ's church.

SAY If you have further questions about the leadership structure, the roles of different staff members or about the role of an elder, please ask me and I can help explain that better.

D. SIGNIFICANCE OF MEMBERSHIP

SAY As you finish the CORE class, I want you to know how glad we are that you have taken this time to grow in your faith and get to know Grace Church better. We hope this class has equipped you to better follow Christ. We also hope it has helped you understand the value of being a committed member of a local church.

When God adopts us into his family through Jesus, He gives us a specific group of brothers and sisters (a local church) to be committed to. Choosing to become a member of Grace Church is a step to formalize your commitment to this group of people and the mission God has called us to. Membership affirms your desire to participate and contribute, as well as receive all the benefits of being part of this church family. And just like a family, we're going to work through our differences with love and grace.

As you read in an earlier CORE session, the family of God is described as a body in Romans 12:4-5:

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. **Romans 12:4-5**

The body of Christ thrives when each part is committed to the other parts and when all of the parts are unified on the mission God has for them.

You have heard several expectations of membership throughout this course, including salvation, baptism, Life Group, L.I.V.E., generosity and tithing, and the Statement of Faith. Members also are asked to attend Annual Celebrations and vote on certain church-wide decisions, such as electing Elders and matters of church discipline. (See the church Constitution and the By-laws for more on this.)

An Invitation into Membership

Remind class participants that if they attended six of the eight CORE sessions and completed their homework assignments, they are eligible to pursue membership. Let them know that if they add their names to the signup sheet, they will be contacted within a week to schedule their membership interview. (Couples can sign-up to be interviewed together.) Remind them to bring their completed membership application to their membership interview. The Site Pastor, a Site Pastor Team member, and a Full-time Staff member are invited to take part in the membership interview.

E. Q&A WITH SITE PASTOR

SAY I want to give you an opportunity to ask me any questions you have about Grace Church. It can be something that came up in this session or in any other session. Or it can just be something you have been curious about.

[Leave 10-20 minutes for questions. You may redirect people to talk with you about their question at a later time, depending on the nature and sensitivity of the question, or the length of the response you would need to give.]

If later you have any other questions or concerns -- especially about the expectations for membership, please let me know, so that we can talk about it before your membership interview.

PRAYER End the session by leading a time of prayer. Encourage participants to pray for the health of the church and that they would become people committed to letting Jesus change them.

HOST Collect CORE evaluations

HOMEWORK:

- Next Steps: Get in a Life Group! Volunteer!
- Prayerfully consider membership. You will receive an email with instructions on completing a membership application if you so desire. Also, be sure to watch the Statement of Faith video if you have not done so. Find it at www.whoisgrace.com/coreclass.

- Pray over the Big Idea that you circled on page 59. What is your next step toward growth in that area?

HOST FOLLOW-UP

- Email participants and thank them for their time and participation in the CORE class. Offer to help with any next steps they are interested in taking, Life Groups, Baptism, Membership, etc. (you can work with your Connections team or Site Lead to connect these people to the correct staff member).
- Make sure CORE evaluations and attendance forms are turned in to EQUIP site leads.

BAPTISM

If any of you have been at a Grace Church service when someone was baptized, then you have witnessed the joy that comes with baptism. There is an obvious joy on the part of the person being baptized, and there also is visible joy in the entire congregation. As a part of the body of Christ at Grace Church, we rejoice when another part of the body takes this step of obedience.

Many people come to Grace Church having been baptized as infants. They wonder then why one of the membership requirements at Grace Church is baptism as a believer.

We definitely do not want to devalue someone's baptism as an infant. It might have been an important family tradition. At the same time, we hold to believer's baptism as included by Jesus in the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 28:19**

In the New Testament, all of the people recorded as having been baptized were people who had made a conscious decision to follow Christ.

Baptism does not wash away sins. It is only water. But Jesus commanded believer's baptism, and it is a powerful picture of how our lives are connected to Jesus.

Read the following passage written by the apostle Paul to the Christians at Rome.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. **Romans 6:1-11**

Being physically baptized in water as a believer is an action that reminds you and every person who is there that a spiritual reality has already occurred in you. Through the cross of Jesus, your life has been forever connected to the life of Jesus. That, of course, changes everything.

GENEROSITY and TITHING

Every corporate worship experience at Grace Church includes a time for people to give their tithes and offerings back to the Lord.

Scripture teaches that Jesus' followers are generous people who invest in the kingdom of God on earth. The tithe -- giving 10% of one's income to the local church -- is a baseline for generous giving that has biblical support.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." **Genesis 28:20-22**

But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. **Luke 11:42**

Throughout Scripture tithing is always shown as a means for those who follow God to worship Him and remember that all we have comes from Him and belongs to Him. The tithe is a way of contributing to the work of God on earth through the local church. A tithe to God through Grace Church helps with the care of widows, single moms, missionaries, and pastors. A tithe helps Grace Church invest in blighted neighborhoods and share the gospel with those who do not yet know Jesus.

Tithing 10% of one's gross income is not a requirement at the time of membership. However, in accepting membership at Grace Church, you are agreeing to work toward that goal as part of your overall generous giving.

Read the following passage written by the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.⁹ As it is written,

*"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."*

¹⁰ *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

ACCOUNTABILITY

The church is intended to be a loving community in which people experience grace, acceptance, encouragement, accountability, and correction. The body of believers at Grace Church values authentic relationships in which people can be honest about who they really are and what they are going through. We strive to accept one another as we are, while simultaneously challenging each other to grow in our obedience to God and His Word. This combination of encouragement and accountability is essential to our growth as followers of Jesus.

Accountability means accepting support from others who can help us become the person Jesus wants us to be. It works best -- most effectively -- when mutual purpose, openness, trust, and love flourish. This is why Life Groups are so vital at Grace Church. They allow us to experience accountability in the context of authentic, caring relationships. Life Groups are most effective when people talk openly about the specific ways God is growing their faith and when they invite their group to support what God is doing in their lives.

Read the following passage written by the apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16

Jesus talks about Christian accountability in another passage:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 18:15-17

Most accountability comes in the form of friends challenging each other to set sin aside in order to become all that Christ asks us to be. Only when this one-to-one process breaks down does the Grace Church staff or elders get involved. On very rare occasions, when the sin is serious and the sinning person refuses to part from it, the matter comes before the members of Grace Church.

No matter what form of accountability someone receives, it should always be based on God's Word, motivated by love -- for the good of the person receiving it -- and aimed at restoration in their relationship to God and others.

APPENDIX

SESSION 1: MATURING CHRISTIANS PARTICIPATE IN A LOCAL CHURCH

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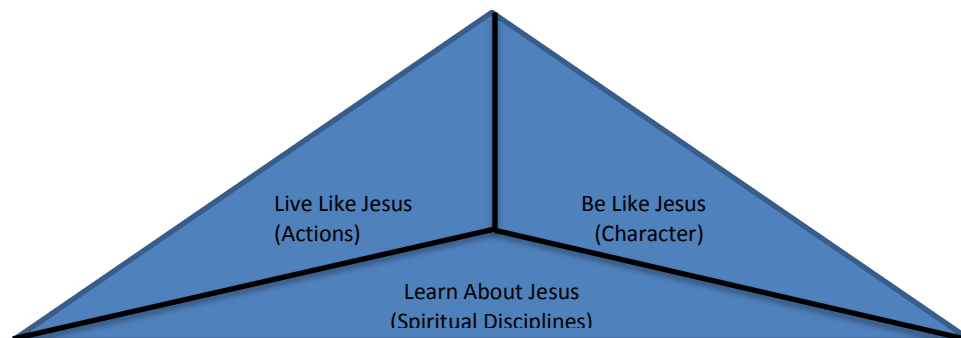
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WHAT IS A FULLY DEVOTED FOLLOWER OF CHRIST?

After we accept God's gift of salvation through Christ, and we've committed our lives to Him, our love for God manifests itself in an ongoing lifestyle in which we continue to learn more about God, we strive to have His character, and we serve Him by the way we live.



Here are some examples (not an exhaustive list):

Learn and Know God More –The personal actions we do to stay close to God.

- Prayer and fasting (Luke 6:12, 1 Cor 14:14-15, James 5:13-16, 1 Thes 5:17, Jude 1:20, Matt 26:41)
- Bible Reading, meditation, memorization (Heb 5:12-14, John 17:17, 1 Thes 2:13, 1 Peter 1 :23-25, 1 Peter 2:1-2, 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Peter 1:5)

Live the Way Jesus Lived --The actions that show our love and obedience to God.

- “L” Live in community
 - Share life with other Christians (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25, Eph 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10; Titus 2:3)
 - Be a positive spiritual influence in your family (Eph 6:1-4; Eph 5:21-33, Col 3:18-21, 1 Peter 3:1-7, Matt 7:9)
- “I” Invest in others
 - Share your faith (Romans 10:9-10; Eph 6:19-20)
 - Serve the poor, widows and orphans (Gal 2:10, James 2:14-26, Luke 18:22, Zec 7:9)
- “V” Volunteer my time and gifts
 - Exercise spiritual gifts inside and outside the church community (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:6; James 1:22-25)
 - Doing constructive, good works daily (Eph 2:8-10)
- “E” Equip myself
 - Engage in life-long learning, and applying Bible teaching to your life (Eph 6: 10-18; Jude 1:20, 2 Tim 2:15)

Be Like Jesus—The character traits we want to develop as we imitate Christ

- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39).
- “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” (Galatians 5:6)
- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5: 22-23)
- “Show justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before your God.” (Micah 6:8)

Being a fully devoted follower doesn't mean that we're perfect! But it does mean that we genuinely pursue Christ and His ways as a response to His love for us, and our growing love for Him. If you'd like to learn more, feel free to contact us at NextSteps@whoisgrace.com.

SITE PASTOR TEAMS

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“One Another”

The “one another” verses in the New Testament give instruction on how to treat other believers.

Below is a list of some of the “one another” verses that are found in the New Testament.

- Mark 9:50: Be at peace with one another [also 1 Thessalonians 5:13]
- John 13:34: Love one another [occurs 20 times in New Testament]
- Romans 12:10: Be devoted to one another
- Romans 12:10: Give preference to one another
- Romans 12:16: Be of the same mind toward one another [also Romans 15:5]
- Romans 14:19: Build up one another [also 1 Thessalonians 5:11]
- Romans 15:7: Accept one another as Christ does
- Romans 15:14: Admonish one another [also Colossians 3:16]
- Romans 16:16: Greet one another with a holy kiss [occurs 4 times in New Testament]
- 1 Corinthians 11:33: Wait for one another
- 1 Corinthians 12:25: Care for one another
- Galatians 5:13: Serve one another
- Galatians 6:2: Bear one another's burdens
- Ephesians 4:2: Forbear one another in love
- Ephesians 4:25: Speak the truth to one another
- Ephesians 4:32: Be kind to one another
- Ephesians 4:32: Be tender hearted to one another
- Ephesians 4:32: Forgive one another [also Colossians 3:13]
- Ephesians 5:19: Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
- Ephesians 5:21: Be subject to one another
- Philippians 2:3: Regard one another as more important
- Colossians 3:13: Bear with one another
- Colossians 3:16: Teach one another
- 1 Thessalonians 4:18: Comfort one another
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11: Encourage one another [also Hebrews 3:13 and 10:25]
- 1 Thessalonians 5:13: Seek for what is best for one another
- Hebrews 10:24: Stimulate one another to good deeds
- James 5:16: Pray for one another
- James 5:16: Confess your sins to one another
- 1 Peter 4:9: Be hospitable to one another
- 1 Peter 4:10: Use your gift to serve one another
- 1 Peter 5:5: Be humble towards one another
- 1 John 1:7: Fellowship with one another

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

“Observation Questions” help you notice the details of the text.

- When and where does this take place?
- Who are the main characters?
- What key words are repeated?
- What major themes are repeated?
- What stands out?
- What comes before and after this passage?
- What do I find difficult to understand?
- Are there specific instructions or warnings?

“Interpretation Questions” help you understand what the author intended the passage to mean.

- What does that word/phrase mean?
- What is confusing about this passage?
- What could I know that would help this to make more sense?
- What would the original hearers have heard?
- What would the original readers have read?
- What is the context – what comes before and after this passage that will help to clarify?

“Application Questions” ask “What does the passage mean for me?”

SPACEPETS - "Is there any . . ."

Sin to confess? Do I need to make any restitution?

Promise to claim? Is it a universal promise? Have I met the conditions?

Attitude to change? Am I willing to work on a negative attitude and begin building toward a positive one?

Command to obey? Am I willing to do it, no matter how I feel?

Example to follow? Is it a positive example for me to copy, or a negative one to avoid?

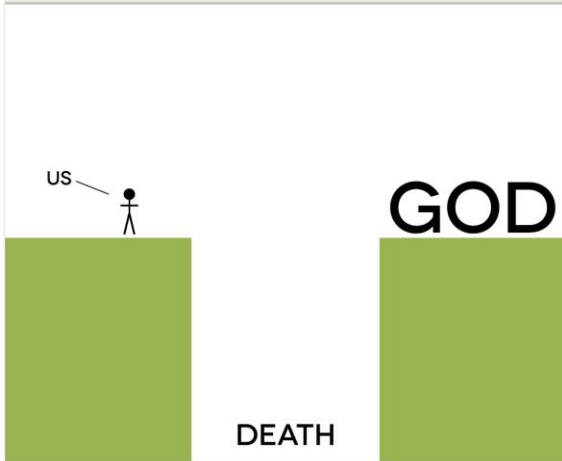
Prayer to pray? Is there anything I need to pray back to God?

Error to avoid? Is there any problem that I should be alert to, or beware of?

Truth to believe? What new things can I learn about God or other biblical teachings?

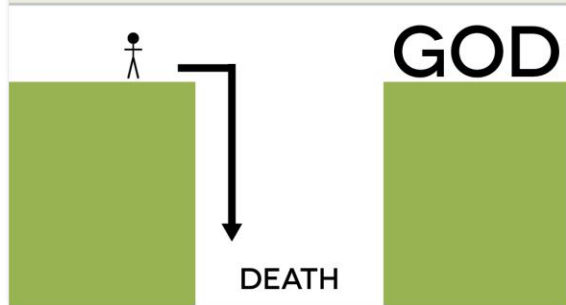
Something to praise God for? Is there something here I can be thankful for?

We matter to God. He made us, and He wants to have a relationship with us. But we rebelled against God. Both actively and passively, we've all disobeyed Him. And our sins have separated us from Him, and broken off the relationship. (Romans 3:23)

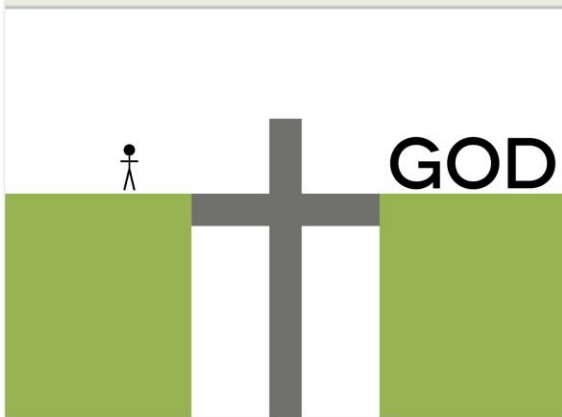


To varying degrees, most of us are aware of our distance from God. I know I was, and you may be, too. And so we start doing all kinds of things to try to get back to Him, like being a helpful neighbor, paying our taxes, going to church, and giving money to charities. There's nothing wrong with these, but the Bible makes it clear that none of them can earn us God's forgiveness or re-establish our relationship with Him.

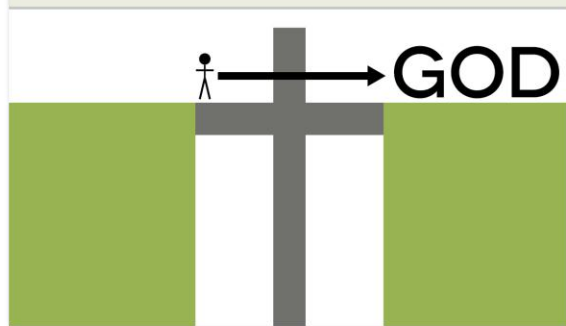
Furthermore, the sins we've committed must be punished, and the penalty we owe is death, which means both physical death as well as spiritual separation from God for eternity, in a place called hell. (Romans 6:23)



The good news, as was referred to earlier, is that we matter to God. In fact, He loves us so much that He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He provided a bridge over which we can find His forgiveness and restore our relationship with Him. He built it by coming to earth as one of us, and dying on the cross to pay the death penalty we owed. (Romans 5:8)



This is a picture of what the central message of the Bible is all about. And that's what God wants each of us to understand. But it's not enough to just know about this or even agree with it. We've got to act upon it. God wants us to move over to the other side. We can move to the other side by humbly admitting to God that we've rebelled against Him and need His forgiveness and leadership. That simple act of trust and obedience results in our sins being pardoned and our debt being paid. Our relationship with God is firmly established, because we're immediately adopted into His family as His son or daughter. (Romans 10:9-10)



GRACE'S HISTORY OF CHANGE

(From whoisgrace.com)

We hear a lot of good feedback about Grace's capacity to adapt and change. These compliments feel good to hear, but we can't take credit for it. The ability to adapt to change is part of our church's DNA. Grace Church has been navigating change for over a century, so we'd be foolish to take credit for it.

On May 1, 1895, nineteen immigrants banded together in a home at the intersection of 7th and Holland to meet and worship in their native tongue. These immigrants didn't legally incorporate as a church but they referred to themselves as the Swedish Baptist Church.

In 1906, those Swedes made their first major change. The house no longer met their needs, so they tore it down and built a new church building on the same lot where they could better serve the needs of the Swedes who continued to immigrate to the area.

By 1939, the founders of the church had passed on and the Swedish population had adapted to their surrounding English-speaking culture. The congregation found themselves facing a dilemma. They could either preserve their rich cultural identity or they could continue impacting the community. But they couldn't do both. The congregation changed their name to Grace Baptist Church and began to hold their services in English. They embraced a hard change and possibly disappointed a few people along the way. But the change was faithful to the mission of the church.

The '50's brought more change and upheaval. The economy was booming and Americans could afford to build a home and move to the suburbs. The families Grace Church was called to reach were quickly leaving the neighborhood. So in 1959, the members of the church made a risky move and bought two acres of undeveloped, rural land on the corner of 38th and Colonial Avenue with the expectation that the farmland would eventually become a booming community. It was a risky change and ultimately the right one.

The '70s marked the beginning of steady growth for Grace Church. In 1974, Pastor Cornell Haan led the congregation to innovate new initiatives that knew the needs of families. New Christians were being added to the church regularly. Pastor Al Detter assumed leadership in 1978 and the church underwent more changes. The congregation grew from 250 people to the nearly 2000 people who call Grace Church their home today.

During those years, the congregation embraced several more changes. The facility went through multiple expansions, new services were added, a church was planted, modern music was embraced, and the church learned that it had to organize and govern itself differently as it grew. In 1978, Grace had two staff members. Today, the pastoral and ministry staff has grown to nearly 90 people including volunteer staff leaders.

Growth in the 2000's forced Grace to change its location one more time. Grace purchased a 41 acre parcel of Grubb Road in and built a 45,000 square foot facility in 2007. This was another risky move, but the church acted boldly and embraced a change that would allow us to be a better resource of hope and healing for generations to come. Then in the fall of 2010 Sr. Pastor Al Detter sensed God's calling him to transition into a supporting role

while promoting Pastor Derek Sanford in the Lead Pastor position. This sacrificial decision was yet another example of the “mission first” philosophy that has marked our history.

This leadership transition opened the door for Grace to embrace a new change and develop a multisite strategy –one church in multiple locations. And on Easter 2011, Grace Harborcreek opened its doors while meeting at Harborcreek High School. After a year of meeting at the school, Grace was gifted a church building in Harborcreek to be our permanent home! God did an amazing thing and used the generosity and selflessness of a handful of people to bless hundreds more.

Then in the fall of 2014 Grace opened another location in the West County in Girard High school – Grace Girard was born. That same year, we committed to launching Grace Online, an online worship experience, so that we could expand our reach to the ends of the earth.

So, yes, we’re constantly changing how we do church so we can continue to present the unchanging gospel to our neighbors. The scriptures demand it and so does our history.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Bible does not lock us into tight restrictions as to the number of spiritual gifts, or even their definitions. The four major lists of gifts are found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and 27-31, Ephesians 4:11-12, and 1 Peter 4:8-11. There also are other passages that mention or illustrate gifts that are not included in these four lists.

As you read through the gifts described below, make a check mark by each gift that, upon initial impression, seems to apply to you. Remember you can have many gifts.

GIFTS THAT COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORD (to both unbelievers and believers):

PROPHECY ("Preaching") *1 Corinthians 14:3; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 13:2; 2 Peter 1:19-21*

The ability to publicly communicate God's word in an inspired way that convinces unbeliever and both challenges and comforts believers. The ability to persuasively declare God's will.

EVANGELISM *Acts 8:26-40; Ephesians 4:11; Luke 19:1-10*

The ability to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ to unbelievers in a positive, non-threatening way. The ability to sense opportunities to share Christ and lead people to respond with faith.

APOSTLESHIP *Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11-12*

The ability to start new churches and oversee their development.

GIFTS THAT EDUCATE GOD'S PEOPLE:

TEACHING *Ephesians 4:12-13; Acts 18:21-24; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29*

The ability to educate God's people by clearly explaining and applying the Bible in a way that causes them to learn. The ability to equip and train other believers for ministry.

ENCOURAGEMENT ("Exhortation") *Acts 14:22; Acts 11:22-24; Acts 15:30-32; Romans 12:8*

The ability to motivate God's people to apply and **act on** Biblical principles, especially when they are discouraged or wavering in their faith. The ability to bring out the best in others and challenge them to develop their potential.

WISDOM *1 Corinthians 2:1, 6-16; James 3:13-18; Jeremiah 9:23-24*

The ability to understand God's perspective on life situations and share those insights in a simple, understandable way. The ability to explain what to do and how to do it.

DISCERNMENT *1 John 4:1-6; Acts 5:1-4; Matthew 16:21-23*

The ability to distinguish right from wrong, truth from error, and to give an immediate evaluation based on God's Word. The ability to discern whether the source of an experience is Satan, self, or God's Spirit.

KNOWLEDGE *Daniel 1:17; 1 Corinthians 12:8; Mark 2:6-8; John 1:45-50*

The ability to discover, collect, analyze, and organize information that is vital to individual believers or the entire church family. The ability to comprehend a large amount of information and provide it when needed for effective decision-making.

GIFTS THAT DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE

SERVICE/ HELPS *Acts 6:1-7; Romans 16:1-2; Romans 12:7*

The ability to recognize unmet needs in the church family, and take the initiative to provide practical assistance quickly, cheerfully, and without a need for recognition

MERCY *Luke 10:30-37; Mark 10:46-52; Romans 12:8*

The ability to detect hurt and empathize with those who are suffering in the church family. The ability to provide compassionate and cheerful support to those experiencing distress, crisis, or pain.

HOSPITALITY *1 Peter 4:9-10; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:1-2*

The ability to make others, especially strangers, feel warmly welcomed, accepted, and comfortable in the church family. The ability to coordinate factors that promote fellowship

SHEPHERDING ("Pastoring") *1 Peter 5:2-4; John 10:1-18; Ephesians 4:11-12*

The ability to care for the spiritual needs of a group of believers and equip them for ministry. The ability to nurture a small group in spiritual growth and assume responsibility for their welfare.

GIVING *2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 2 Corinthians 6:8; Luke 21:1-4*

The ability to generously contribute material resources and/or money beyond the 10% tithe so that the Body may grow and be strengthened. The ability to earn and manage money so it may be given to support the ministry of others.

GIFTS THAT CELEBRATE GOD'S PRESENCE (Worship or prayer-related gifts):

CREATIVE COMMUNICATION *Psalms 150:3-5; 2 Samuel 6:14-15; Mark 4:2, 33*

The ability to celebrate God's presence by using the arts (writing, art, drama, music) to communicate God's truth. The ability to use variety and to captivate people and cause them to consider God's message.

CRAFTSMANSHIP *Exodus 31:3-11; 35:31-35; 2 Kings 22:5-6; Acts 9:36-39*

The ability to build, maintain, or beautify the place of worship for God's glory. The ability to express worship through a variety of art forms.

PRAYER-RELATED GIFTS:

INTERCESSION *Colossians 1:9-12; Romans 8:26-27; John 17:9-26*

The ability to pray for the needs of others in the church family over extended periods of time on a regular basis. The ability to persist in prayer and not be discouraged until the answer arrives.

****HEALING** *James 5:14-16; Mark 2:1-12; Acts 3:1-16*

The ability to pray in faith specifically for people who need physical, emotional, or spiritual healing and see God answer. The ability to sense when God is prompting you to pray this kind of prayer.

****MIRACLES** *Mark 11:23-24; Luke 5:1-11; John 2:1-11*

The ability to pray in faith specifically for God's supernatural intervention into an impossible situation and see God answer. The ability to sense when God is prompting you to pray this kind of prayer.

****Tongues/ Interpretation** *1 Corinthians 14:13-15; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; 1 Corinthians 14:1-33; Acts 2:1-11*
The ability to pray in a language understood only by God or one who is given the gift of interpretation at that time.

**Not in the spiritual gift assessment because those who have these gifts do not need an assessment tool to discover it.

GIFTS THAT SUPPORT THE WHOLE CHURCH:

LEADERSHIP *Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:17; Luke 22:25-26*

The ability to clarify and communicate the purpose and direction, the vision, of a ministry in a way that attracts others to get involved. The ability to motivate others by example to work together in accomplishing a ministry goal.

ADMINISTRATION *1 Corinthians 12:28; Acts 6:1-7; Exodus 18:13-26*

Also called the gift of organization. That is the ability to recognize the gifts of others and recruit them to ministry. The ability to organize and manage people, resources, and time for effective ministry. The ability to coordinate many details and execute the plans of leadership.

FAITH *1 Corinthians 12:9, 13; Hebrews 11:1; Romans 4:18-21*

The gift of faith is the ability to trust God for what cannot be seen and to act on God's promise, regardless of what the circumstances indicate. The willingness to risk failure in pursuit of a God-given vision, expecting God to handle the obstacles.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

A. THE TRIUNE GOD

There is one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each person being fully God. God the Father, along with Jesus the Son, is the Creator and Lord of the universe who both governs all things according to His will and is accomplishing His purpose in the world and in the church. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human, the only mediator between God and humanity. The Holy Spirit is necessary for the individual's new birth and growth to maturity. The Holy Spirit empowers and indwells the church as well as each individual believer.

Gen. 1:1, 26; Isaiah 45:21-22; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:4-6; Luke 10:21-22; John 1:1-4; Revelation 4:11; I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 2:9; Colossians 1:16-17; John 3:16; Titus 3:5,6; Jude 20-21; John 14:16-17, 26

B. THE BIBLE

The Holy Scripture in its entirety is inspired by God's Spirit through human authors and constitutes the revelation of God's truth to humanity. It is trustworthy and without error in its original manuscripts in all that it affirms. Whatever the Bible, rightly interpreted, teaches followers of Christ are bound to believe and obey. It is the supreme authority in every matter of belief and conduct, and it establishes moral absolutes for the human race.

2 Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:21; Matthew 5:18; John 10:35; John 17:17; I John 2:5

C. THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

All human beings are created in God's own likeness and therefore have inherent value and equality before God. All human life is in the image of God and is sacred.

Genesis 1:27; Ephesians 1:4-13; Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1:4-5; Acts 17:28

D. THE HUMAN CONDITION

Humanity is hopelessly lost by imputation of sin as a result of Adam's sin as well as by personal sinful acts. This sin and guilt have rendered mankind subject to God's wrath and condemnation and have resulted in humanity's alienation from God's life, suppression of God's truth, and hostility to God's law. God's love desires all to come to repentance and to be reconciled rather than condemned.

Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Jeremiah 17:9; Acts 3:19; Acts 16:31

E. SALVATION

Salvation from the guilt and penalty of sin has been achieved solely through the work of Jesus Christ – his perfect obedience, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection and exaltation to heaven as Lord. Apart from Christ, there is salvation through no person, church, creed, process, or power. Each sinner is justified before God and reconciled to God only by divine grace appropriated by faith alone, apart from human merit or good works. Authentic salvation is evidenced by a transformed life.

Romans 5:12-19; Romans 10:9-10; John 3:16; John 14:6; John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:3-9; 2 Corinthians 13:5-6; James 2:14-26

F. THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

There is one, holy and universal church, which is the Body of Christ, and to which all true believers belong. As the Father sent the Son into the world, so the Lord Jesus Christ sends his church to participate in God's mission by words and works. In this mission the church is called to proclaim the gospel of God's grace, to baptize and

make disciples among all nations, to exhibit God's character through compassionate care for the needy; to push back the forces of evil, and to demonstrate to humanity the reality of God's kingdom.

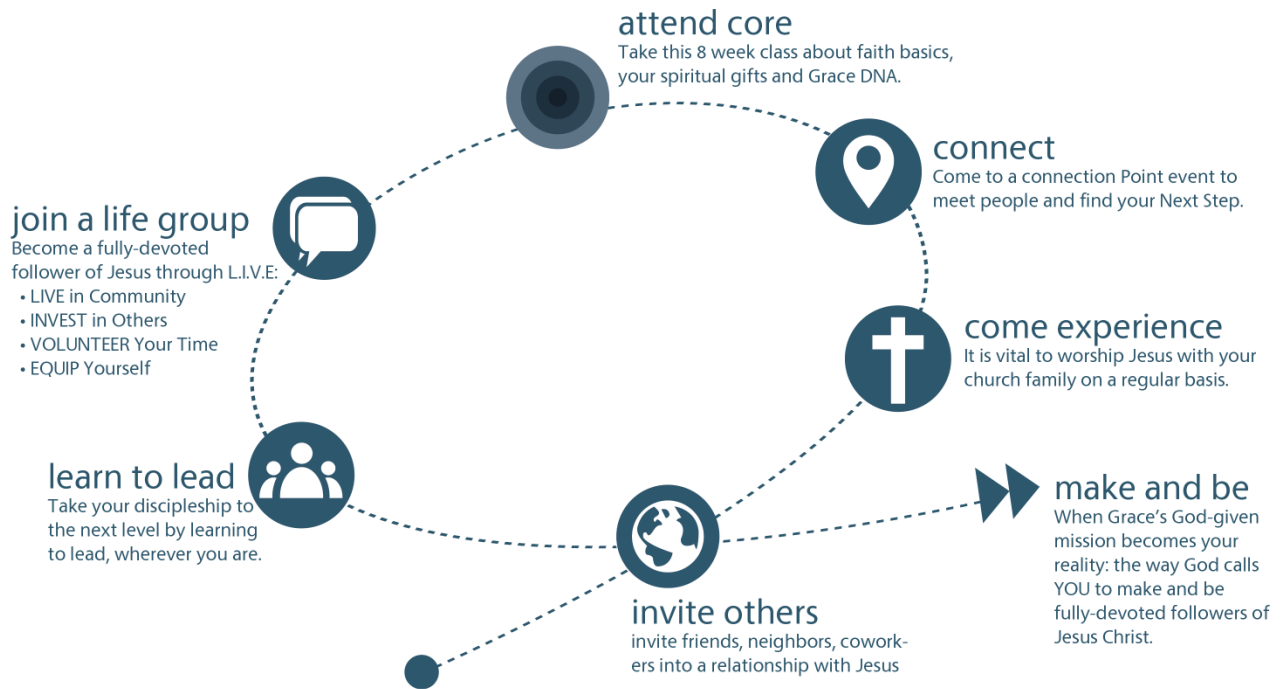
Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 16:16-18; Matthew 22:37-40; Isaiah 61:1-3; Acts 1:8; Matthew 25:34-45

G. LAST THINGS

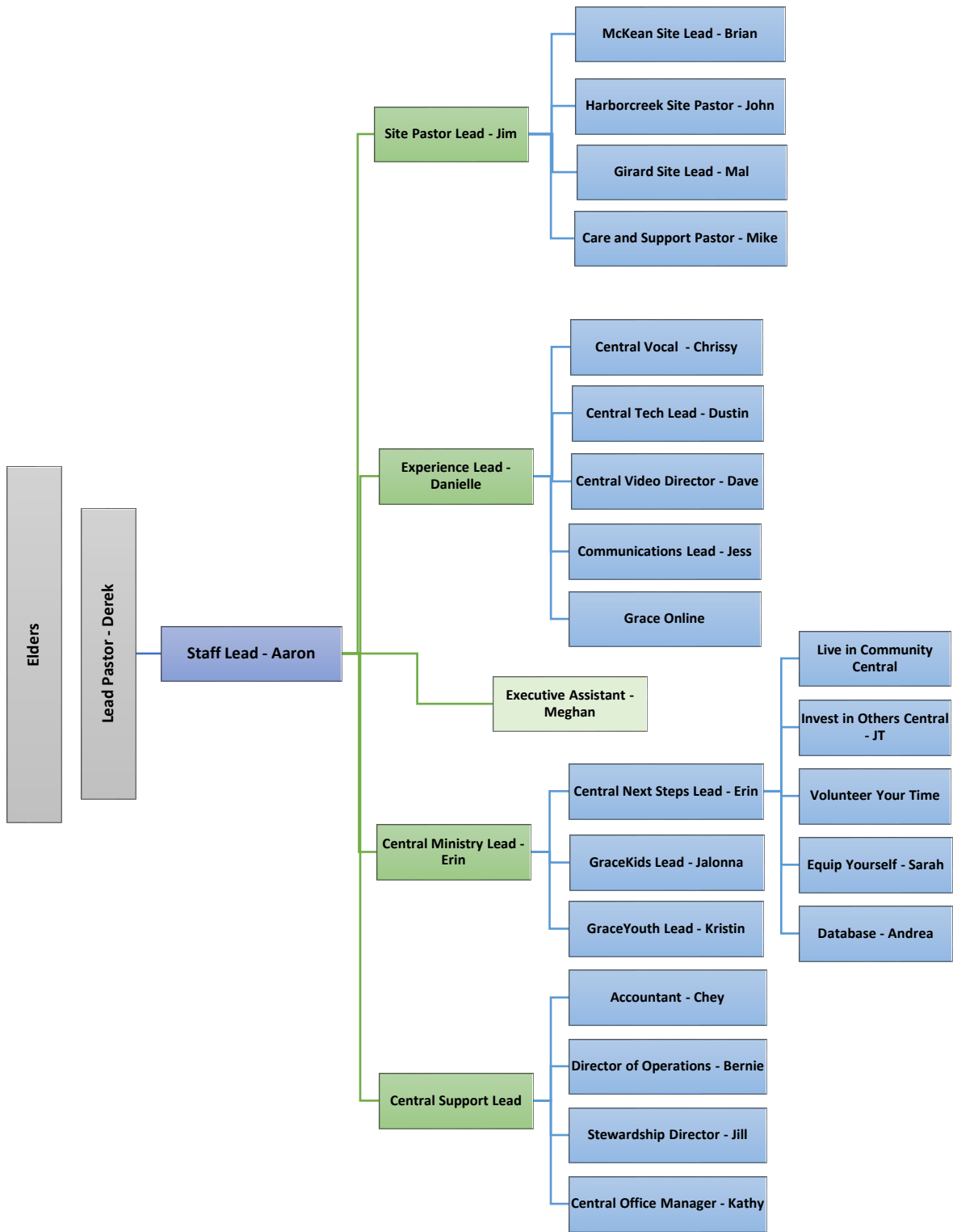
As the Lord Jesus ascended to his Father, so He will return literally, physically, and in glory. He will raise the dead and bring salvation and judgment to final completion. All humanity will be resurrected for judgment and entrance into either eternal life or eternal hell. There is no second opportunity for salvation after death and all who did not trust Christ will stand condemned. God will then fully establish his Kingdom and finish the new creation - a new heaven and a new earth from which all evil and evildoers, all suffering and death, will be excluded and in which God will be glorified forever.

Acts 1:11; I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 11:15; Revelation 20:4-6; I Corinthians 15:42-44; 51-52; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 25:46

NEXT STEPS PATHWAY



THE PHILOSOPHY OF HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH GRACE



4 WAYS TO GIVE

at Grace Church



ENVELOPE

SEAT IN FRONT OF YOU
CASH/CHECK/CREDIT/DEBIT



KIOSK

ATRIUM
GIVING STATION



ONLINE

whoisgrace.com
DESKTOP/PHONE/TABLET



AUTOMATED

whoisgrace.com
AUTOMATE THE IMPORTANT

Ways to Give:

1. **Electronic:**
 - a. **On-Line Giving:** Make a one-time gift or set up automatic, recurring gifts.
 - b. **By Smart Phone Text:** Text any \$ AMOUNT and GRACE to 45888 using a debit/credit card.
2. **Weekend Service:** Give by cash or check during any weekend service.
3. **On-Line Banking:** Set up a one-time or recurring gift through on-line bill pay. Use memo line for any special giving instructions.
4. **Mail:** Send gift by mail to Grace's central office: Grace Church, 7300 Grubb Rd., McKean, PA 16426, Attn: Giving.
5. **Legacy:** Make a gift through your Will or Estate Plan, designate Grace as a beneficiary of an insurance policy, IRA or 401k, or utilize a Charitable Gift Annuity or Charitable Trust. **What Can I Give To?**

What Can I Give To?

Ministries & Operations: We encourage you to direct most of your giving to this fund, because this is the fuel that drives everything we do in ministry at Grace.

Missions

The Forward Project

Debt Reduction Fund

Benevolent Fund

Haiti – Sion School Sponsorship

For more information, go to www.whoisgrace.com/giving or contact Director of Stewardship Jill Mintsiveris by phone 814-790-4973 x229 or email jill@whoisgrace.com.