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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations taken from: New American  
Standard Bible. La Habra, CA: Foundation Publications, for the Lockman  
Foundation, 1971. Print.

(Cover design by Evan Logan | [www.evanlogan.com](http://www.evanlogan.com))

ISBN-13:  
978-1539479840

ISBN-10:  
1539479846

***"To God be the glory in the church"***  
— Ephesians 3:21

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# THE GOSPEL

*Foundations* is about living unto God as a member of a local church. Church membership, though, is for *Christians*.

Scripture reveals that a church is Christ's body, bride, and dwelling place (cf. Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 5:23-27; Rev. 19:7-9). Those who join a church, therefore, are first to be united to Jesus by faith. In the New Testament every Christian was identifiably connected to a local church. This is God's will for His people. When we are united to Jesus, we are also to be united to a local church where we will grow godliness, love, and service.

When considering church membership, the most vital question is, "*Am I a Christian?*" To answer that vital question, we must believe *the Gospel*.

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The Gospel is the good news about what God has done in Christ for our salvation. The Bible reveals that there is One God, Who is Triune, eternal and needless. He created everything and everyone. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned against Him, plunging all humanity beneath God's just judgement (cf. Rom. 5). Instead of condemning us forever, God carried out His eternal plan of love to redeem a people for Himself by sending His Son, the Lord Jesus.

Just as God had promised in the Old Testament,



God the Son—Jesus of Nazareth—came to earth, born of a virgin. He lived the entirety of His earthly life before God in perfect holiness, just as we should have lived. Then, He died in willing obedience unto God as a sinless sacrifice for us. On the cross, Jesus suffered the condemnation we deserved, purchasing our forgiveness from, and reconciliation with, God. Three days later, God demonstrated His acceptance of Christ's sacrifice in our stead, by raising Jesus from the dead.

To become a Christian, you must *repent* from your sin (agreeing with God about your sin, and turning from any effort to save yourself) and *believe* upon the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and everlasting reconciliation with God (entirely entrusting your whole self to the risen Jesus as Lord). Upon salvation, God declares over you the unblemished righteousness of Jesus forever, and the Spirit indwells, empowers and enables you to increasingly live for God.

This Jesus, Who bled and died for our sins and was raised to life everlasting, is now seated in heaven as Lord. He will return to rescue His people forever into the joy of unbroken fellowship with God.

Upon believing the gospel, God the Holy Spirit takes up residence within you, ever guiding you to love and obey the Lord, until at last, you see His lovely face. Following true conversion (i.e. "getting saved"), obedience to Jesus includes baptism and church membership.

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***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. — Romans 1:16***

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# WELCOME!

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Welcome to *Foundations*! This resource and seminar exist to help you seek God about church membership. Before you join any church, you should seek to understand the foundation upon which the church is built.

## JOIN A PERFECT CHURCH

Sorry. No church on earth is perfect. But Jesus is! Where He reigns as Lord, there is true joy and lasting satisfaction.

And there is no place under heaven where the Lordship of Jesus is more clearly displayed than in *a local church comprised of believers who are seeking to glorify God by treasuring Jesus Christ and spreading His eternal joy*. That is not unique to Grace Church. Every Christian desires to belong to a church family where they may join other believers to seek God like that.

Grace Church is not perfect. Our joy depends on looking away from ourselves and beholding Jesus. As we fix our eyes on Him, we are joyfully transformed into His likeness, being made increasingly useful in His service.

## WE INVITE YOU TO JESUS!

Welcome to Jesus! He is the source of our fellowship and joy. We welcome you to join us in the happiest place on earth—beneath His gracious rule.

## LET'S PRAY!

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The open secret to praying with confidence and conviction is to pray in agreement with Scripture. As the Bible informs our prayers, we are sure that our requests accord with God's will. Many times, God has written out prayers for us to offer back to Him.

The following paragraph was written by the Holy Spirit. Instead of reading it, let's bow together, and pray it!

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*"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."* — Ephesians 3:14-21

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## OUR AIM

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Obviously, no one wants to be led into a detrimental relationship. So, where is *Foundations* going? What is the aim? Our goal is to encourage and cultivate two specific results; Informed prayer and God-honoring church members.

### CULTIVATING PRAYER

The immediate aim in *Foundations* is to equip you with *biblical* guidance to prayerfully seek the Lord regarding church membership. Without prayer we cannot follow the Lord. Obviously, you ought not join a church without asking God for His guidance. So, pray over the things you encounter in *Foundations*.

### CULTIVATING CHURCH MEMBERS

The overall aim of *Foundations* is to encourage you to follow Jesus by becoming a faithful member of a local church. In fact, we hope your devotion to your church is an increasingly clear reflection of God's devotion to His people (cf. Acts 20:28). Whether you join Grace, or another congregation, we pray that *Foundations* will serve you well to *that* end. If you are not led to join Grace, our elders would be glad to recommend other churches in the area whose ministers and ministries we've found to be faithful.

For those who will covenant as members of Grace Church, our prayer is that you will *experience* and *enrich* the themes you find in this resource. Don't think of joining a church *only* to receive, but also to contribute according to the ways God has gifted and equipped you.

## WHY DOES GRACE EXIST?

Sometimes gigantic things can fit in tiny spaces. Christians ought to be able to express our faith in faithful, concise ways. We believe the same applies to churches. Why does Grace Church exist? We're glad you asked!

### THE REASON WE LIVE GOVERNS HOW WE LIVE

What's the point of life? Many search diligently, but few find lasting pleasure. Scores of people who "have it all" remain empty. Even when the early church father, Augustine, had "everything" he was still miserable. That is, until he realized that "our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in Thee."<sup>1</sup>

Grace Church is not aiming to be novel. We're seeking to walk in "the ancient paths" (Jer. 6:16; 18:5). Our "vision" is not to be clever, or catchy, unless our terms are consistent with the inspired canon. We want to feed upon and bleed *Bible*.

Our conviction is that a summary statement for a local church should—as faithfully as possible—be an encapsulation of the message of the entire Bible. The goal is not slick slogans. The goal is to know and honor the One True God (cf. John 17:3). In that light,

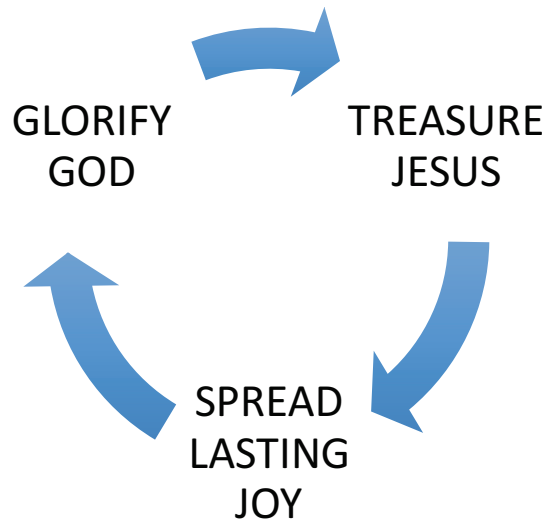
<sup>1</sup> Augustine. *Confessions*, translated by Rex Warner. New York: Mentor, 1963.

Grace Church has attempted to summarize the message of Scripture in two brief statements. The first, articulating why we exist, and the second, how we therefore we will focus the effort of our lives.

## OUR VISION: WHY WE EXIST

*We exist to:*

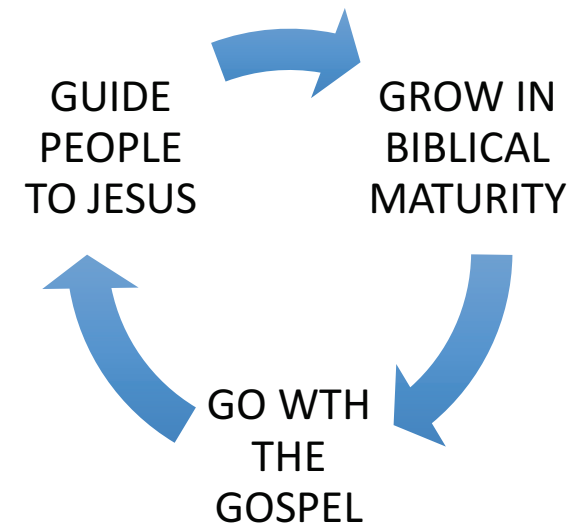
*Glorify God by  
treasuring Jesus Christ and  
spreading His eternal joy.*



## OUR MISSION: HOW WE LIVE

*We aim to:*

*Guide people to faith in Jesus.  
Grow together in biblical maturity.  
Go to neighbors & nations with the gospel.*



# CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

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Some argue that “church membership” is not taught in Scripture. Even though the phrase “church membership” do not appear in Scripture, the category is replete in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> There are many texts that are impossible to obey apart from a *meaningful, identifiable, quantifiable* connection of one’s life to one local church.

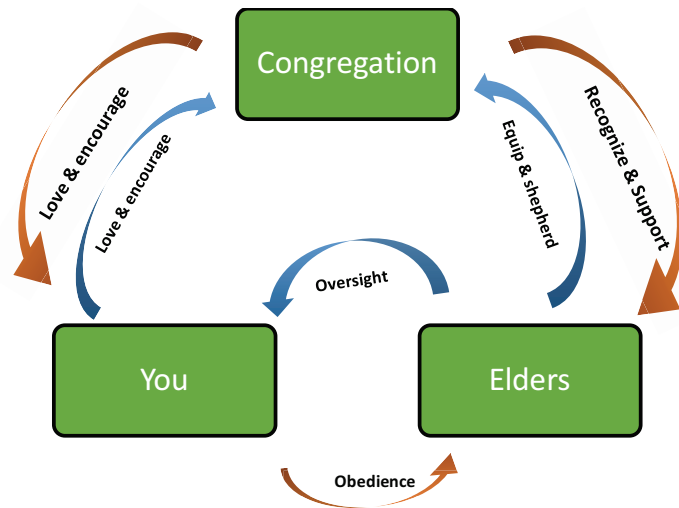
Christian accountability, for example, is a very *biblical* mandate for every believer. In the New Testament, the way our accountability ought to most often flesh-out is through committed investment in a church family.

Before we deal with a number of passages that undergird this conviction, use the following chart to complete the exercise with your group.

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<sup>2</sup> Keep in mind that many other essential truths of the Christian faith are not contained in our concise terminology either. For example, “Trinity,” “evangelism,” “missionary,” and many other words are faithful summations of the Christian faith. Similarly, church membership is a radically biblical concept, taught many places in Scripture.

## BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP



Following the diagram, see if your *Foundations* group can locate passages in Scripture that apply to each direction of the relationships.<sup>3</sup>

- **A congregation → individual Christian:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- **An individual Christian → congregation**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

<sup>3</sup> Feel free to consult the references for the "One Another Commands" found in the Appendix, pp. 71-72.

- **The elders/pastors → individual Christian**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- **An individual Christian → elders/pastors**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- **The elders/pastors → congregation**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- **The congregation → elders/pastors**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

As you can see from *Scripture*, God has *plenty* to say about the relationships between Christians, churches, and elders. Friends, *that* is the biblical foundation for intentional, identifiable, and meaningful church membership.

Christians are called by God to be well-connected with the names, faces, and particular life circumstances of other specific Christians, so that each believer will be able to obey God's clear commands in these relationships (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26).

## THE BIBLE AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Clearly, we can see the argument that “church membership is not in the Bible,” has failed to account for the many passages where the biblical authors often wrote from the assumption that *every* Christian is deeply connected to a local church. Otherwise, many of the Bible’s explicit commands cannot be obeyed.

Thus, every Christian should be a church member, and the entire body should strive together to teach and observe all Christ’s commands (Matthew 28:18-20).

# CHURCH HEALTH

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Health is often taken for granted when present, and sorely missed when absent. But, who is to say if a church is healthy, or not? According to what standard? Is a church’s health based on the number of people in attendance? If so, are well-attended mosques spiritually healthy? Is a celebratory Sunday atmosphere the key mark of health? If so, are pagan concerts spiritually healthy? What about an attractive and entertaining children’s ministry? If so, are theme-parks spiritually healthy? Thankfully, God has not left us in the dark about His intentions for the health of Christ’s bride (cf. Ephesians 5:25-33).

## INGREDIENTS FOR CHURCH HEALTH

What does the Bible have to say about how a church should function? Surely we do not want to experience the consequences of attempting to do God’s work “our own way” (cf. 2 Kings 7-23)?

Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit is pleased to stir the following ingredients together to produce ever-increasing health in a local church. Where these aspects of biblical life are *present*, and *increasing*, the church will continue to mature in God-honoring ways.

### 1. Biblical Preaching

At the *very core* of a truly healthy church you will find the faithful, expository, Christ-centered, gospel-focused, experiential, and worshipful preaching of God's Word (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-2).

### 2. Biblical Prayer

Healthy churches glorify God—The Great Provider—by depending on Him *together* through biblically informed prayer (cf. Acts 2:42; 12:2).

### 3. Biblical Theology

The truth of Scripture *dominantly shapes* the *whole life* of every truly healthy church (cf. Jer. 9:23-24).

### 4. The Biblical Gospel

The hope of the world and the health of the church *depends* on the Person, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

### 5. Biblical Salvation

When God causes a sinner to live for His glory through repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, healthy churches do not hesitate to give God *all* of the glory for that most miraculous exchange (cf. Ephesians 2:1-10).

### 6. Biblical Evangelism

Consistently *commending Christ* to our neighbors and to the nations is an essential ingredient of every healthy church (cf. Acts 13:49).

### 7. Biblical Membership

Healthy churches are made up of people who have been *born again and baptized*, who regularly enjoy gospel fellowship with the risen, returning Christ and one another through *the Lord's Supper* (cf. Acts 8:38; 1 Cor. 11:23-32).

### 8. Biblical Discipline

Healthy churches recognize and practice twin expressions of church discipline.

*Formative discipline*—which happens to all of God's people continually through our regular submission to the ministry of His Word, is an essential aspect of church health (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The loving and redemptively-designed *corrective discipline* of the church toward her wayward covenant members, is also a biblical essential of church health (cf. Matt. 18:15-17).

### 9. Biblical Polity

In biblically healthy congregations, *Christ rules as the Head* of the church; *the entire body* seeks, affirms and implements His will; *elders* shepherd the body by providing spiritual leadership; and *deacons* serve the

body in Christ-like humility (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Eph. 4:11-16).

#### 10. Biblical Reproduction

Healthy churches seek to reproduce *by leading people to Jesus* and *gathering* them in Christ-exalting churches both locally and globally (cf. Acts 15:41; 16:5).

## WHAT ARE GRACE'S MAIN MINISTRIES?

Our members are our ministers and missionaries. We believe that every Christian, and therefore, every church member, is called by God to be a full-time ambassador of Christ in their spheres of influence.

Our homes, families, neighborhoods, and workplaces are our mission fields for the gospel. Thus, Grace is not highly programmatic. Rather, our pastors are seeking to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry in their rhythms of life with intentionality (cf. Eph. 4:11-12). Our pastors aim to equip the people through the following primary ministry expressions.

#### 1. Corporate Worship

Grace Church meets each Sunday for worship including congregational prayer and preaching.

The liturgies<sup>4</sup> for each of Grace's corporate



<sup>4</sup> "Liturgy" refers to the intentional order of the worship service. Instead of a haphazard collection of songs and prayers, Grace's services seek to follow the "gospel pattern." Beginning with declarations about God, and His glory, acknowledging our sin and need for a Savior, and climaxing with the preaching of the Gospel and the Lord's Supper.

gatherings are built around the passage of Scripture that will be preached. The sermon texts are available ahead of time, to encourage the individuals and households to prepare their hearts to seek the Lord together.

MAY 1 <i>Memorial Day</i>	Heb 13:9-14
MAY 8 <i>Mother's Day – AAF Promo Begins</i>	Heb 13:9-14
MAY 15 <i>Parent &amp; Child Dedication</i>	Heb 13:15
MAY 22	Heb 13:16
MAY 29	Heb 13:17-19
JUNE 5	Heb 13:20-21

## 2. GraceKids & Rooted

Grace Church offers focused biblical instruction for children and teenagers, with the aim of encouraging and supporting parental discipleship.

*GraceKids: Birth – 6<sup>th</sup> grade*

The vision for Grace's children's ministry is to invest a solid biblical foundation in children, newborn through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Our *GraceKids* curriculum rotates on a three-year cycle through systematic theology (learning Grace's *Tasting the Truth* catechism and Scripture memory) and biblical theology (following Grace's *Sing God's Story*, a Christ-centered journey through the entire Bible).<sup>5</sup>

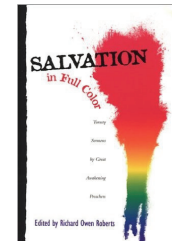


<sup>5</sup> *Systematic Theology* is the discipline of organizing the Bible's teaching on a particular topic (e.g., salvation, marriage, heaven). *Biblical Theology* is the discipline of learning the message of Scripture as revealed in canonical order—Genesis to Revelation.

*Rooted: 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade*

*Rooted* is Grace's ministry for teenagers (ages 13-18), walking through God's Word and helping apply a biblical worldview to all of life.

This ministry is based upon a vision to disciple teenagers through 12 strategic biblical themes over the span of six years before they graduate from high school. The aim to help young people learn how to live for Christ in God's world, God's way, according to God's Word.



## 3. Grace Groups

The small group ministry of Grace Church seeks to equip God's people through the study and application of Scripture, while also providing an environment for members to get to know and care for one another on a very practical level. During the first ten years of Grace's life, the members who have grown the most in their walk with the Lord have also inevitably been those who have been most faithful in their small groups.

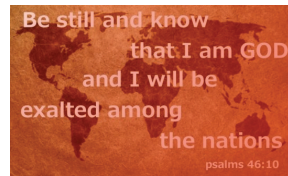
Our Grace Groups rotate their content between *Teleios Academy* studies (inductive Bible studies written by Grace Church members; Fall semester) and topical studies (Various options; Spring semester). The aim of Grace Groups is to equip our members to apply biblical truth to every area of life, and encourage the body to love one another in word

and deed, aiming at presenting each member complete in Christ.

#### 4. Evangelism & Missions

Grace Church's strategy for reaching out to Memphis, and the nations, is the same: Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, and seeking to gather converts into local churches where they will be taught to obey all Christ's commands.

Instead of mainly depending on church-organized evangelistic events, we encourage every member to pray for and pursue people in their spheres of life with the gospel. Because Grace Church gathers in the Uptown community, we encourage our entire church family to intentionally pray for and reach out to people in that area of our city. A number of Grace's members have chosen to live in this part of the city as missionaries.



#### 5. Discipleship

Biblical discipleship happens when one follower of Christ helps another follower of Christ become a better follower of Christ.

Although not as visible at Sunday gatherings, our elders encourage gender-specific, life-on-life, Word-based ministry between members to be ever-present in the life of Grace Church.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Members who desire to be connected to a discipling relationship, but do not have a specific

#### 6. Pastoral Ministry Training

For those interested in a more robust and structured form of training in the Scriptures and church health, or for those who have a sense of God's call to gospel ministry, Grace offers a ministry internship and pastoral residency program.



This is a church-based theological and pastoral training opportunity for members who desire to grow in godliness, or someday serve in pastoral leadership (at Grace or elsewhere). These training programs are also open to church members who simply desire to go deeper in the Word of God, and service to this body of believers.<sup>7</sup>

person in mind, are encouraged to reach out to an elder for help with suggestions, or getting started.

<sup>7</sup> The pastoral training programs begin in January. Applications are available each Fall. More information about this ministry can be found at Grace's website.

# WHAT IS GRACE'S POLITY?

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Polity refers to the way an organization is led or governed. God has spoken in His Word about how the church is to be structured, led, and served.

In short, Grace's polity is four-fold: *Jesus Christ* is our Head; We are *elder-led*, *deacon-served*, and the *entire congregation* seeks, approves, and implements the will of God. That summarizes the essence of our church polity.

## 1. Jesus Christ — Our Head

Jesus Christ is the Head of His church. Christ's Headship is made visible in the church through the proclamation of Christ-centered, Christ-exalting, gospel-drenched biblical preaching and teaching.

Jesus loves His church, and He gave Himself up for her, purchasing her with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25).

Supporting Texts: Eph. 2:20; 3:6; 4:12; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19; 1 Cor. 12:27.

## 2. Congregational Responsibility & Accountability

In Scripture, the local church is referred to as “the bride of Christ” (Ephesians 5:25). A church’s membership, therefore, should only be made up of those who have repented from their sins and placed all faith for salvation in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, upon publicly professing faith in the Lord Jesus through baptism, an individual is eligible for church membership. The whole congregation, as God’s people, is responsible to seek, affirm, and implement the will of the Lord. The gathered assembly is to be one of the highest priorities of God’s people. The Scriptures say, “...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling 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

Supporting Texts: Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-5; 15:22; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 6:4; 12:12; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Heb. 10:24-25; 13:17.

## 3. Elders

Each New Testament church had a plurality of elders (cf. Acts 14:23; Js 5:14). In the Scriptures, the Greek words for *pastor*, *shepherd*, *bishop*, and *overseer*, are used interchangeably (cf. Acts 20:17-38).

God raises up Christian men who are spiritually-gifted, God-called, and biblically-qualified (cf. 1

Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) to serve as Christ’s under-shepherds for His people. These men are set apart by the Lord to lovingly care for Christ’s congregation, especially by feeding them from His Word. Faithful elders are part of God’s good design for the edification and equipping of His people: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Supporting Texts: Acts 11: 30; 14:21-23; 15:2,4,6,22-23; 16:4; 20:17,28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:14; Titus 1:5-9; James 5:14.

## 4. Deacons

Deacons are servants of the Lord, who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and who humbly serve His people through His strength. Grace currently has several men and women appointed as deacons, each ministering in a particular area of need within the body. At the same time, we also affirm that the term used for deacons in the New Testament (Greek: *diakonos*) oftentimes indicates that every Christian is called to be a deacon (Or, servant) of Christ. “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:26).

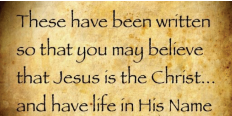
Supporting Texts: Matt. 20:26; 23:11; John 12:26; Acts 6:1-6; Rom. 16:1; Philippians 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

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## GRACE CHURCH MEMBER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*Updated October 2006*



These have been written  
so that you may believe  
that Jesus is the Christ...  
and have life in His Name

### I. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and is without error in the original manuscripts.

We believe that the Bible is the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right, and also in testing all matters of saving knowledge, saving faith and Christian conduct. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is to be assessed by criteria consistent with the teaching of Scripture.

*Psalm 19:7; Mark 13:31; John 8:31, 32; John 20:31; Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.*

### II. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite Personal Spirit, Who concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of humanity, hears and answers prayer, and Who

saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. To Him alone all creatures owe the highest love, reverence, trust, and obedience.

We believe that there is one living and true God, the Maker, Preserver, and Ruler of all things, having in and of Himself all perfections, being infinite in them all.

*Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 145:3; Matthew 23:9; Luke 10:21, 22; John 1:3; 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:31; Colossians 1:16-17; 1 Timothy 1:1, 2, 17; 2:5, 6; 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6.*

### III. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, the preexistent only begotten Son of God, being Himself fully God. We believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary who remained a virgin until after the birth of Christ.

We believe in His sinless life, miracles, and teachings; His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the divinely appointed and only Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church and the Sovereign of all creation.

*Isaiah 53:10-12; Matthew 1:18-25; 20:28; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1, 14; 20:28, 30-31; Acts 1:9-11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9-10; 8:34; 9:5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:15; 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 1:1-3; 3:16; 7:25; 9:28; 1 Peter 2:21-23.*

### IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. We believe the Holy Spirit is a Person, Who instead of glorifying Himself, glorifies the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Apart from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit no one could come to faith in Christ.

We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment; that He faithfully preserves all saints until the end for the glory of God alone, and that He perpetually intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Adoption, the Seal of our Salvation, and the Pledge of our inheritance in Christ.

*John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9, 14-17; 26-27; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 1:13-14.*

### V. THE TRINITY

We believe that God eternally exists in three Persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though He is Triune, we believe God is without division of nature, essence, or being; and that each Person of the Godhead possesses, and is equal in, every divine perfection.

We believe the Persons of the Triune God execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of all things, and that God alone, in His Triune Person, possesses exhaustive knowledge and so purposes all things according to the counsel of His own will.

*Genesis 1:1,26; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; John 1:1,3; 4:24;  
Romans 1:19-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:5-6.*

## VI. PROVIDENCE

We believe that God, from eternity, ordains all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and all events, yet so as not in any way to be the author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of moral beings.

*Isaiah 46:9-11; Psalm 115:3; Proverbs 16:33; Colossians 1:17;  
Hebrews 1:3; James 1:13-15.*

## VII. THE FALL OF HUMANITY

We believe that man was created by God in His own image and for His glory, but that man sinned and fell short of the glory of God, thus incurring physical, spiritual, and eternal death, which is eternal separation from the favor of God in an everlasting hell.

Consequently, we believe that all human beings are born with a sinful nature opposed to God and His law, and are sinners by choice, therefore being under God's just condemnation.

*Genesis 1:26-27; 2:17; 3:1-7, 19; 6:5, 12; 8:21; Jeremiah 17:9; John 5:24; Romans 3:9-20; 5:12-19; 6:21, 23; 7:13; 8:6-7; 9:22;  
Ephesians 2:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; James 1:14-15; 1 John 3:14; Revelation 21:8.*

## VIII. REGENERATION

We believe that regeneration is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit Who gives life to those dead in trespasses and sins, awakening their minds, and renewing their whole nature, so that they practice repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This divine work produces the desire to love and practice holiness according to the word of God.

We believe regeneration is the work of God's free and special grace alone, yielding in the regenerate an instantaneous and eternal paramount allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we believe that the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual; but that He indwells every person who trusts in Christ, empowering every Christian to make progress in overcoming sin and in becoming more like Jesus Christ in thought, deed, and love for God. We believe that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to those who have been converted for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

*Ezekiel 36:25-26; John 1:13; 3:3, 5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17;  
Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:5.*

## IX. REPENTANCE AND FAITH

We believe repentance and faith are gifts from God, which follow upon God's gracious drawing of sinners through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Repentance occurs when a person being led by the

Holy Spirit is made sensible of the manifold evil of his sin, detests and forsakes it, humbling himself with godly sorrow and self-aborrence, and endeavors by the strength which God supplies to walk before Him so as to please Him in all things.

Saving faith is the belief, on God's authority, of whatever is revealed in His Word concerning Christ, and a clinging to and trusting Christ alone for justification, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Saving faith is necessarily accompanied by all other sanctifying graces, leading to a life of holiness, the outcome of which is eternal life.

*Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 3:8-10; Mark 1:15; John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 44, 65; Acts 2:37-38; 11:18; 13:38-39; 17:30; 20:21; Romans 2:4-5; 3:21-28; 4:1-5, 17-25; 6:22; 8:1; 10:3-4, 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 7:10-11; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 1:29; 3:9; Hebrews 11:6; James 2:14-26.*

## X. SALVATION

We believe that only those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, by virtue of His atoning death on the cross, and submit to Him as Lord, embracing Him as Supreme Treasure, are justified, delivered from condemnation, and receive eternal life.

We believe this Spirit-wrought salvation leads to a growth in grace through persevering, Holy-Spirit-empowered resolve to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive with Christ.

*Psalms 51:7; Matthew 13:44; John 1:13; 3:14, 16; 5:24, 30; 8:12; 17:3; Romans 3:21-26; 6:11; 8:1; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 19; Philippians 3:7-13; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:12; 3:1-3; Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:39; 1 John 1:9.*

## XI. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

We believe that a Christian should live for the glory of God and the wellbeing of others—particularly by communicating to all peoples the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A Christian's conduct should be blameless before the world; he should be a faithful steward of his possessions, and he should seek through the strength which God supplies, to realize for himself and others the full stature of maturity in Christ, pressing after a heavenly life in joyful obedience to all Christ's commands.

*Ezekiel 36:27; Matthew 5:16, 31-32; 19:1-9; 28:20; John 14:15, 23-24; Romans 1:26-27; 6:1-7:6; 8:3-4, 12-14; 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 4:2; 6:9-10, 18; 10:31; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9; 12:21; Galatians 5:13-24; 6:7-10; Ephesians 5:3-6; Hebrews 12:1-2; 13:5; Colossians 1:9-10; 3:17; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; 1 Peter 2:12; 2 Peter 1:3-11; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:16-18; Revelation 21:8,*

## XII. THE CHURCH

We believe in one holy universal Church made up of all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and Supreme Treasure.

We believe that God calls believers to unite in local churches as a means of helping each other preeminently value Christ by praising Him together, growing in our love and knowledge of Him, stirring each other up to love and good deeds, and practicing all the other Christian graces all for the glory of God and the joy of the Christian.

*Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:16; Acts 1:8; 2:42; 15:36, 41; 16:5; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 4:11-16; 5:19-21, 23; Colossians 1:18; 3:16; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25; Revelation 1:4-11.*

### XIII. THE ORDINANCES

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to His churches: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We believe that Christian baptism occurs by immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a sign of a person's fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ and of remission of sins.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is in no sense a sacrifice but was instituted by Christ to commemorate His death, to stimulate faithful obedience to all Christ's commands, and to be a pledge and renewal of their communion with Him and with one another.

We believe that these two ordinances should be administered and observed until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Matthew 26:26-29; 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-31; 12:13.*

### XIV. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the consummation of His kingdom.

We believe in the resurrection of the body and the final judgment of all people leading to the eternal joy of the righteous in the Lord's presence and the endless suffering of the wicked in hell.

*Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; Mark 14:62; John 5:28-29; 14:3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:12-28; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15.*

### XV. CHURCH COOPERATION

We believe that local churches can best promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in an organized fashion. Such cooperation, whether a network, a local association, a state convention, or a denomination, exists and functions by the will of the churches, and is a voluntary cooperation that may be terminated at any time.

This being understood, Grace Church is affiliated with the churches in the Treasuring Christ Together Church Planting Network; the Mid-South Baptist Association; the

Tennessee Baptist State



Convention; and the

Southern Baptist Convention. This church may

likewise cooperate with interdenominational or nondenominational



fellowships on a voluntary independent basis.

*Acts 15:36, 41; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelation 1:4, 10-11.*

# GRACE'S ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

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Because the Bible instructs that pastors/elders must possess certain character qualifications and also “be apt to teach” (cf. 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9), Grace Church has also adopted *The Grace Church Elder Affirmation of Faith*.<sup>8</sup>

This theological statement of faith is more robust than our *Member Affirmation of Faith* and is the doctrinal standard that our pastors personally embrace and affirm. Thus, the teaching and preaching ministry of Grace Church will accord with our *Elder Affirmation of Faith*. Therefore, it would be wise for every prospective member to become familiar with our *Elder Affirmation*, as it summarizes the diet that will be fed to the congregation.

Each of the churches in the *Treasuring Christ Together Church Planting Network* have adopted this same Affirmation, uniting us in our sisterhood of congregation with a common vision of God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The *Grace Church Elder Affirmation of Faith* can be found on our website at: [www.gracechurchmemphis.com/elders](http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com/elders).

<sup>9</sup> For more information about TCT, see: [www.tctplanting.net](http://www.tctplanting.net).

# HOW WE SEEK TO LIVE OUT OUR FAITH

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## GRACE CHURCH COVENANT

*Updated December 2006*



*Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive Jesus Christ as our Lord, Savior, and Supreme Treasure, and having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of the Triune God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.*

*We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to be actively involved in the corporate prayer, corporate worship, and small group life of this church; and to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministries and expenses of this church.*

*We also engage to be zealous in our corporate and individual efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior*

*through the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ among all peoples; to seek the salvation of our family, friends, and acquaintances; to maintain personal and family devotions; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to walk watchfully and uprightly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our commitments, exemplary in our demeanor, and encouraging in our conversation; to be always seeking the Lord's help to be making progress in Christlikeness; to avoid all gossip and excessive anger; to abstain from all drugs, food, drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.*

*We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate sincere concern for one another's joys and sorrows; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the commands of our Savior to secure it without delay.*

*We moreover engage that when we leave this church we will, if possible, carry out the spirit of this covenant by uniting with a church where we will be taught to obey the Word of God.*

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip us with everything good that we may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

## COVENANT ACCOUNTABILITY & SOUL-CARE

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Because of the gospel of Jesus, and by the Spirit's power, we want to live holy lives for the glory of God. The pastors and members of Grace Church strive, therefore, to hold one another accountable to such a life, using our *Covenant* as a guide for accountability.

We do not have *any* members who claim to live up to the standards of our *Church Covenant* at all times. But we *aspire* to live in compliance with the *Covenant* because we believe it summarizes the shape of a God-honoring life according to Scripture. Therefore, we embrace, rather than shun, accountability.

If there are any aspects of our *Covenant* that you are unwilling to embrace, or allow fellow members to reference in holding you accountable, then you ought not seek membership in Grace Church.

# HELP FINDING A CHURCH HOME<sup>10</sup>



## 1. DILIGENT PRAYER

Your prayers about church membership should be *heavily* informed by the church's theological convictions and ministry practice. Earnest prayer is *essential* in choosing the church God wants you to join.

## 2. BIBLICAL COUNSEL

Godly friends and pastors who employ Scripture to help guide you in finding a church home are among the main ways God loves to lead His people.

## 3. BIBLICAL PRIORITIES

See to it that the Bible's main priorities for a local church become your main priorities in choosing a church home.

In order for a local church to be faithful, the

<sup>10</sup> The following guidance was adapted from Mark Dever's helpful book, *What is a Healthy Church*.

gospel must be truly affirmed, clearly proclaimed, and faithfully lived upon. The preaching must be faithful to Scripture, and *central* to the congregation's life. Additionally, the way the church observes the ordinances ought to have *great* importance to you in selecting a church home.<sup>11</sup>

To help you think through *biblical* priorities in finding a church home, consider questions such as: How, and for whom, does the church practice baptism, and for whom does the church offer the Lord's Supper? Who is eligible for church membership, and service in ministry positions? Does the congregation practice church discipline, and who has the final say on decision making? Would I want myself, my spouse, and my children brought up under this church's teaching? What picture of Christianity will I see in this church? Am I willing to continue to grow if I join this church? Would I be happy to invite non-Christians to this church? Is this a church where I can minister and serve?

Take the initiative to talk with some members of the church. Are they applying the church's teaching to their life?

#### 4. GEOGRAPHY

Will you be able to *regularly* and *actively* participate in the gatherings and ministries of the church (cf. Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:19-25)?

<sup>11</sup> The ordinances given to the local church by the Lord Jesus, are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

## HOW DOES GRACE ADD NEW MEMBERS?

Church membership is one of life's most important decisions. The local church you join will govern a large portion of what you are taught, who you walk in fellowship with, and will guide many of your opportunities for ministry.

Seeking to join a church, therefore, should be entered into with careful consideration and ample prayer.

### THREE "STAGES" TO JOINING GRACE CHURCH

There are three stages involved in moving toward membership in Grace.



## STAGE #1: INTRODUCE

*“It’s nice to meet you!”* Does that sound helpful when considering investing *your life* with God’s people? We sure hope so! We want to know you, and for you to know us.

Submitting a completed *Membership Introduction Form* is the first stage in moving toward church membership in Grace.

*Intro Forms* allow you to make a spiritual introduction of yourself to our elders. These can be printed from our website, or found at the Sunday resource table.<sup>12</sup>

## STAGE #2: ACQUAINT

The second stage in pursuing membership in Grace includes two parts, allowing Grace to introduce ourselves to you.

This stage is designed to be *far more relational* than what pen and paper are capable of providing. This step includes participating in two seminars, and a spiritual care conversation with two of our elders.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com/about/how-to-join-grace>. Instructions for how this form should be submitted are detailed in its final section. (Attending *Starting Point* and *Foundations* may precede submitting this form).

The two seminars are *Starting Point* (two weeks; covering two sessions) and *Foundations of Grace* (two weeks; covering six sessions). The first seminar—*Starting Point*—walks through the gospel and true conversion. The second seminar—*Foundations*—deals with Grace Church’s beliefs and practices, and church membership (walking through this booklet).



Another aspect of stage #2 includes a more personal way to encourage, counsel and care for you. This happens through a “*Share & Care*” conversation(s) with two of our elders. This conversation will be scheduled *after* your completed *Member Introduction Form* has been submitted, and you have participated in *Starting Point* and *Foundations*. These care conversations usually take place in your home. In addition to spiritual care from our pastors, these conversations provide an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have about Grace Church.

## STAGE #3: COVENANT

*After* completing the initial two stages, and upon a recommendation to the congregation from the elders, individuals will be invited to the third stage of pursuing membership.

This stage involves publicly affirming our *Member Affirmation of Faith* and *Church Covenant* during a scheduled Sunday service. We refer to this as a *Covenant Affirmation Service*.

Upon hearing someone's statement of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, and his or her embrace of our church's doctrinal standards and *Covenant*, the entire congregation then corporately affirms the will of the Lord for adding individuals as members.

Seeing the Lord Jesus build His church continues to serve as a source of our increasing joy in God (cf. Matt. 16:13-18; Eph. 3:21).

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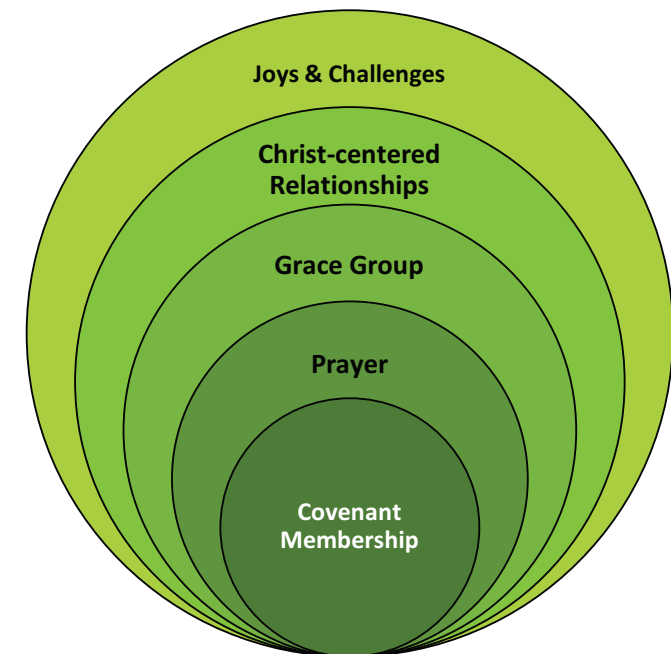
***...upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. — Matt. 16:18***

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## WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER JOINING GRACE

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The old adage too often holds true: “*Unstated expectations almost always go unmet, and almost always lead to frustration.*” What should you expect if the Lord leads you to join Grace Church?



## WHAT WOULD HEALTHY COVENANT MEMBERSHIP LOOK LIKE IN MY LIFE?

### 1. COVENANT MEMBERSHIP:

The beginning of real involvement in Grace Church is becoming a covenant member. Membership is *the* way to get plugged into ministry with the body. Non-members may attend our Sunday Gatherings, but they are *not* meaningfully connected to Grace Church.

### 2. PRAYER

Immediately upon joining Grace, you will be added to the church's weekly prayer guide, our online information-sharing resource (*The City*), as well as the pastoral prayer rotation on Sunday's. You will be included in the next Prayer Directory as well. and you will receive a pictorial prayer directory including all your fellow church members. We are a people who pray for one another.

### 3. GRACE GROUP

Immediately upon joining, you will be connected with your Grace Group and group leader.

### 4. CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS:

Although you may have built some healthy relationships with members prior to joining, you should *proactively* get to know others in the body as a

member. Everyone needs godly friends, and you ought not wait for others to pursue you in this capacity. In an ideal situation, everyone is pursuing, and being pursued in healthy, God-honoring ways.

It is obviously impossible to know everyone instantly. But, you should make *a concerted effort* to begin getting to know your fellow church family. Take the initiative. Waiting for others to take the lead can unintentionally set you up for disappointment, and tempt you to give way to unrealistic and uncommunicated expectations you have placed upon other members.

That said, our elders are also encouraging the other members to be zealous in getting to know you as well. If you are faithful in your small group, and are still having trouble finding healthy, Christ-centered relationships in the body, please talk with one of the elders as soon as possible.

### 5. JOYS & CHALLENGES

New members should expect great blessing when joining the body. And they should understand that spiritual warfare will come because our enemy does not want you to grow in the grace of Christ. Look for God's hand at work in everything, and brace yourself for disappointment. Your fellow church members, including your pastors, will probably disappoint you at some point...soon. That is not our intention, but like you, we are also broken people in need of God's grace.

If you have been around Grace Church long enough, you have probably already experienced some

measure of joys and challenges. When your expectations are not met, or someone fails to follow-through on their good intentions, it is easy to become dejected, and begin to believe that no one cares. That perspective is simply not true. Guard yourself against such lies by continuing to pursue healthy, Christ-centered relationships with others in the body.

Together, we are to strive continually for our relationships to demonstrate our church name—Grace (cf. Heb. 10:23-25).

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***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. — Heb. 10:23-25***

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# HEALTHY WAYS TO LEAVE GRACE CHURCH

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Does it surprise you that the longest section of *Foundations*, which is a resource dedicated to why and how to *join* Grace Church, is devoted to how to *leave*?

Unfortunately, many people depart churches in terribly immature ways, which leaves the entire congregation wondering and wounded. Out of love for you, and for those in the Grace Church family, we want you to know on the front-end how to leave well. We also want to try to protect you from the distorted view of seeing yourself as a consumer and Christ’s bride as the retailer. No! Do not “shop” for a new model of church every so often. Rather, learn to love God’s people just as God does. In fact, that’s precisely what He commands us to do (cf. 1 John 4:7-21; John 13:34-35).

## YES, YOU CAN LEAVE GRACE CHURCH IN A HEALTHY WAY, AND WE WILL HELP YOU

Only a heretical cult would prevent someone from leaving its membership. We abhor the idea that members of Grace Church are “trapped” within the confines of the body. That is *not* the case.

God's kingdom is big, and we are under no delusion that every member will remain at Grace Church for their entire lifetime. The Lord will lead some members to transition elsewhere (indeed, He *has!*). Others will be "lifers" with Grace. Of course we would love for everyone to remain for life, and we certainly encourage that decision! What a tremendous investment of one's little "vapor" (cf. Js. 4:14).

But when a member transitions to another church, it is sorely unwise, unhealthy, and unbiblical to use the "*God told me so*" adage as a trump-card. Just as when you join Grace Church, if God is speaking to you to leave, others will hear from Him as well. But how? We are so very glad you asked!

### HOW TO LEAVE GRACE CHURCH WELL

As the Lord leads people to transition to another church (locally, or in another city) *we want* you to know on the front-end how to leave Grace Church as a member we can recommend to your future congregation "in good standing." As strange as that may sound to some, that's the way churches have operated for centuries. However, many modern churches have abandoned this practice, which encourages members to "shop" for a new model of church again and again.

*Our Pastors will help you leave well*

If you are reluctant to approach our pastors about leaving, it is *not* because they don't want hear from

you. It's also *not* because they will shut you down if you bring up the subject. Rather, they *want* to listen and try to help.

Just as they sought to provide care leading up to, and during, your time as member, our pastors aim to care for church members when they are transitioning to another church. A number of former members have approached our elders in this way, and some have avoided them altogether. Others have "sought them out" only to notify them that their decision has already been made. This is not a healthy way to "*walk together in Christian love.*"<sup>13</sup>

According to our *Covenant*, those who leave Grace Church "*...will, if possible, carry out the spirit of this covenant by uniting with a church where [they] will be taught to obey the word of God.*"

It only makes sense that if you intend to leave Grace in order to unite with a church for *that*, then you would do so in a way that *models* this is what you truly desire. Let us try to help you seek God about this decision.



<sup>13</sup> A line from our *Grace Church Covenant*.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE LEAVING GRACE CHURCH

#### ***1. Have I sufficiently taken this transition to the Lord in prayer?***

It should be assumed that no one should join a church without ample prayer. The also applies if you consider leaving a church. The reason Grace requires a membership seminar like *Foundations* is partly because we want prospective members to have a well-informed basis as they pray about pursuing membership. We want you to be served well on the *front end*.

#### ***2. Have I let my pastors know, and have I welcomed their counsel and prayers?***

Some may think that the last person you would ever want to talk to when leaving a church is the *pastor* of said church. We believe the Scriptures teach that the path of wisdom is precisely the opposite (cf. Eph. 4:1ff). No one will throw stones at you if you want to talk about leaving. Our pastors *will not* allow it. Your (fallible) pastors would rather seek to help you discern the Lord's will, and they will pray with you about the important decisions you are facing.

#### ***3. Is there any unconfessed sin I am unwilling to confess and part with?***

Godly people do not run from godly people in order to remain in any sin. Instead, they run toward godly people who will help them run toward the Lord, as a help to forsake sin.

If (even part of) your reason for considering a church transition to another church is owing to unconfessed sin, then the pastors would love to talk with you and help apply the gospel to your soul—which would actually be a major reason you should *not* leave.

#### ***4. Am I at odds with any member of Grace Church? If so, have I fully sought resolution through prayer and pursuing the person(s) according to Scripture?***

One thing is for certain if you join Grace Church: her people will sin against you—members and pastors alike. Unfortunately, you'll do the same. And guess what? That is the case for every church on the planet. Please understand what we *are* saying, and what we are *not* saying.

We *do not* want to sin against you. But, when that happens, we should pursue one another, seeking forgiveness and restoration. Indeed, such puts the beauty of the gospel on display.

Do not leave Grace Church because you are unwilling to make things right with another brother or sister in the body. That is a carnal way to live.

**5. Is my reason for leaving doctrinal? If so, how significant is this doctrinal issue?<sup>14</sup>**

We are not going to agree on everything. No one does. But we must agree on essential truths related to God and the gospel. All of us are still in process, growing and learning.

If someone does not see eye to eye with you on a doctrinal issue, *you* may be the one holding the correct view. But maybe not! So, unless your theological disagreement is a “first-tier” issue (essential for salvation), then do not leave because of it. Instead, prayerfully and patiently seek to help others, including yourself, “be Berean,” as you search the Scriptures together.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Truth matters! And all truth is significant. However, some doctrinal convictions are indispensable for the Christian faith, while others are “secondary,” though still vitally important. Is your doctrinal concern in the very center of Christianity’s essence? Or, can Christians disagree on the matter, while still walking in fellowship with one another?

<sup>15</sup> Acts 17:11 — “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

**A HEALTHY PROCESS FOR LEAVING GRACE CHURCH**

After you have considered the previous five questions, maybe it is time for you to leave? If so, what next?

**1. *Pray and involve the pastors from the onset.***

Through the years, the Lord has brought precious saints to Grace Church, and later moved to another church, or another part of the world. On many occasions, our pastors have sat with such members, thinking and praying with them over the momentous decision before them. In the end, for some it has proven to be the Lord’s will for them to make the transition.

Once these members have been grafted into the membership of another church, Grace Church has *then* affirmed removing them from our membership, and prayed for God’s richest blessing to fill their lives.

If you ever begin to sense that the time has come for you to move on from membership at Grace Church, we encourage you to include the elders in the process of seeking the Lord’s face with you. Elders are God’s good gifts to help shepherd us, especially in times of major life needs and decisions.

**2. Understand before you join Grace that the entire congregation affirms the Lord's will to add members to the body, and the entire congregation affirms the Lord's will when someone is removed from membership.**

There is no such thing as “independently unsubscribing” from membership in Grace Church. To put it biblically, we are a family. To put it bluntly, we are not a social media platform.

Upon joining, each member affirms our *Member Affirmation of Faith and Church Covenant*, following which *the whole church* affirms the will of the Lord for adding individuals to our faith family.

Similarly, a member can only be removed from the church's membership *the very same way* they entered; namely, through a congregational vote to affirm the Lord's will for them to be removed. Would the church family be loving you well if they collectively voted to allow you to run from God, or His people? Of course not. Therefore, the body needs to be aware that you are praying about leaving. The pastors *want* to give you the opportunity to tell the church what you are praying about *well before* you leave.

The only favorable way for a member to be removed by the congregation is for the individual to be walking in biblical obedience in the way they leave.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> On several occasions, and with a broken heart, Grace Church has had to remove individuals from church membership through discipline (cf. Matthew 18:15-17). Other than removal “in good standing,” church discipline is the only other option. The Bible does not know “a third way” to leave a church. In cases of discipline, the congregation is publically expressing grave concern (at best!) for the individual's spiritual well-being *because* they are not walking in obedience to Scripture and have proven unwilling to amend their ways.

**3. Do not disappear.**

Avoid the temptation to vanish, cutting off conversation with fellow members and pastors. That is an obviously immature practice, and is deeply hurtful to the church body that loves you and wants God's best in your life. Disappearing without notice also communicates something about you *that might not be true*; namely, that you are holding on to some sin that you are unwilling to forsake.

While it may seem irrelevant to supply this word of counsel in a pre-membership resource, we have experienced this regrettable approach more than once in Grace's brief history.

**4. Know before you leave Grace Church —based on diligent research and ample prayer—which church you will most likely join. Your membership will not be held at Grace Church indefinitely.**

As we have said throughout *Foundations*, every Christian ought to be a member of a local church. That is the biblical pattern.

That is why those who join Grace Church publically affirm our *Covenant* which says you will seek to join another church upon leaving. Thus, the congregation you will likely join should to be in view *before* you leave. You should not want to be without the covering, help, and protection of a church family through an unnecessarily delayed “transition period” between churches.

Be aware that if you are led to leave Grace Church,

we believe that six months is a reasonable amount of time for you to join another faithful church. Our pastors are happy to help you try to find as many faithful churches in your new area as they can before you ever start packing to leave. And, our elders will contact the pastor(s) of your next church to ensure you are well cared for.

***5. As you entered membership with deep appreciation for, and open-hearted reception of, the grace of God, leave as one who extends that same grace to your fellow members. Meaning, do not divide the body.***

You may be hurting upon your departure. We certainly hope not! But remember the familiar saying, “*Hurt people, hurt people.*” Typically, our hurts are not exclusively someone else’s fault. And more often times than not, resolution and restoration is readily available even in the most challenging situations. Of course, restoration depends on all parties being willing to seek the Lord.

That said, if your leaving Grace is owing to a challenging situation, please depart with great grace, not great division. For the record, if Grace Church abandons the gospel, and ceases to be faithful in preaching, teaching, and applying the Scriptures, then we hope *everyone* leaves. If, however, you find yourself dealing with a difficult issue that is not core to the gospel, then God requires you to “be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

***6. Commit yourself—as soon as possible—to one local church for the rest of your life.***

For your own good, find a church family that you can belong to until you meet Jesus face-to-face. Whether that church is Grace, or not, it is will serve your soul well to plant deep roots sooner than later. You will mature more spiritually when you are in a position to learn to love God’s people through “thick and thin.”

In the new heavens and new earth, which have already been purchased for us by our blessed Lord Jesus, we will have plenty of time and energy to explore new places. But, on this side of eternity, precious few souls have known the joys of living with a cluster of God’s people for a lifetime. That may not prove possible for you, but we encourage you to make longevity in a local church your hearty, prayer-filled ambition.

More than job advancement, retirement dreams, or anything else, your church family should have priority. While it may seem strange to some that we would prioritize your local church over job or location preferences, your church family is far more vital to your overall health and usefulness in God’s kingdom than most other factors. We, therefore, encourage those considering a job-transition to identify a (highly likely) church home in the new city before accepting the new job, or buying a new home, or choosing another profession, or selecting a University. Yes, we believe that church life is *that* important. We believe that one’s church decision should drive other *important* functions of life, rather

than follow them.

***If you leave Grace Church, there are healthy ways to do so. Leaving well will set you up for spiritual success wherever the Lord may take you next. In the end, all we want for those who remain, and those who leave, is increasing conformity to the image of Christ.***

## APPENDIX

### GOD'S "ONE ANOTHER" COMMANDS

Are you walking in loving obedience to Jesus today? If so, the Lord's commands will have some noticeable application in your life. One of the *main* ways your obedience to Jesus will be seen is in the relationships God has given you in your local church. In fact, apart from "church membership," it would be *impossible* to obey many of the commands that God gives to His people. This is yet another reason Grace Church practices covenant membership.

Consider the following "one another" commands and try to think *practically* about how these divine instructions are to be obeyed. Is it possible to walk in obedience without being deeply connected to a local body of believers? Look up some of the verses, and write out what it would "look like" to obey them.

### UNITY WITH ONE ANOTHER

*Mark 9:50; John 6:43; Romans 12:6; 15:5, 7; 1 Corinthians 11:33; Galatians 5:15, 26; Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; James 4:11; 5:9, 16.*

### WHAT WOULD OBEDIENCE LOOK LIKE?

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### LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

*John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 4:7, 11; 2 John 5.*

WHAT WOULD OBEDIENCE LOOK LIKE?

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### HUMILITY TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

*John 13:14; Romans 12:10, 16; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5.*

WHAT WOULD OBEDIENCE LOOK LIKE?

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### VARIOUS ONE ANOTHER COMMANDS

The following references touch on themes of Christian living, such as “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2), “praying for one another” (James 5:16), and “being hospitable to one another” (1 Peter 4:9).

*Romans 14:13; 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 3:12; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9, 16; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 10:24; James 5:16; 1 Peter 4:9.*

WHAT WOULD OBEDIENCE LOOK LIKE?

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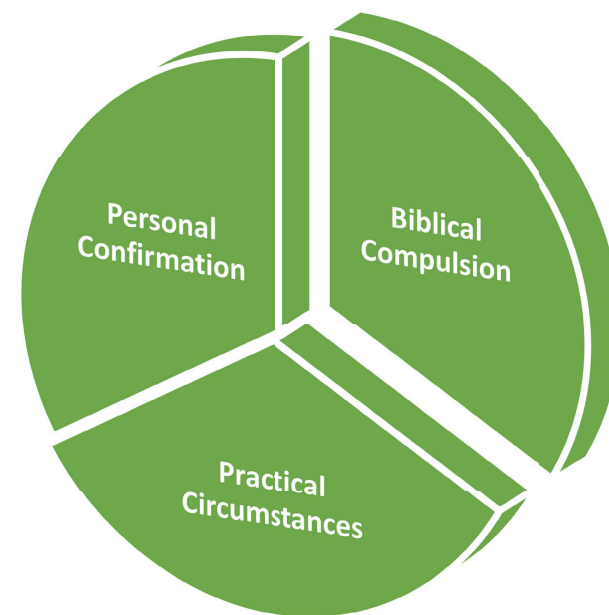


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# HOW DID GRACE BEGIN?

GOD'S LEADERSHIP IN THE LIVES OF  
OUR FIRST PASTORS

The Lord's unavoidable guidance was at work in the three families who banded together to begin Grace Church.



Every church that exists began for some reason(s). There were three primary reasons Grace Church was planted in Memphis, TN.

### 1) BIBLICAL COMPULSION

The Word of God is, *by far*, the most compelling factor that led to the establishment of Grace Church. Although the Spirit graciously used many other influences to lead to her existence, none have been as influential as God's Word.

The New Testament refers to the time between the resurrection and return of Jesus as the "last days" (cf. Hebrews 1:1).

#### ***What matters most to God now?***

The Bible also reveals that God is accomplishing *three main purposes* in the last days:

THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD'S NAME

THE EDIFYING & EQUIPING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD

#### ***How is God fulfilling His three main purposes?***

In Scripture, we learn that God is accomplishing each of these three magnificent purposes through *the*

*local church.*

The Apostolic pattern in the Bible shows that first-century churches were typically planted in major city-centers. Each new church then assumed responsibility to carry the gospel to areas within her sphere of influence (cf. Rom. 15:19). We believe the Lord has called Grace to that same gospel-bearing privilege in the Mid-South, and indeed to the ends of the earth (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Below are some of the key texts the Holy Spirit used to birth an impulse for church planting in the hearts of our founding pastors as they met and prayed together for three years prior to Grace's inception.

**Matthew 16:18** – "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

**Matthew 28:16-20** – "But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

**Acts 1:8** – "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

**Acts 2:41-47** – “So then, those who had received [the] word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

**Acts 5:14** – “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number...”

**Acts 6:7** – “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

**Acts 16:5** – “So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”

**Acts 20:28** – “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

**1 Corinthians 14:12** – “So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.”

## AN ESPECIALLY COMPELLING TEXT

***“to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”***

— Ephesians 3:21

See also: Matt. 16:21; 2:39-47; 4:4; 9:16, 31; 10:43; 11:18, 24, 26; 13:48; 14:21; 20:28; Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 12:28; 2 Cor. 8:18; Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1; Rev. 2:29.

## 2) PRACTICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

“Why is Grace in Memphis?” “Does Memphis really need another church?” “Isn’t the need in other less-churched cities of the United States greater than the need in Memphis?”

These are just a sampling of the questions with which our founding pastors wrestled. These questions remain important to Grace Church as it relates to our ministry in Memphis.

## MEMPHIS’ POPULATION

One sobering observation is that even if every church in Memphis heralded a faithful proclamation of the gospel, there would remain a need for more Christ-centered churches to reach the ever-growing population of our city. Although some consider Memphis a heavily “churched” city, there are simply not enough faithful churches reaching her current population.

### MEMPHIS' SPIRITUAL CONDITION

Taking a spiritual survey of our land is another important factor for the location of Grace Church. In so doing, it becomes staggeringly apparent that an evangelical presence in downtown Memphis has been on the decline for decades, while the residential population has been simultaneously on the rise.

Grace is currently comprised of members from various places around the greater Memphis area. Our people have a heart affinity for the Mid-South that is natural, real, and deep. Our congregation loves the people of our city, and we long to see them made glad as Christ is rightfully honored in their lives. Joining the Apostle Paul, we also pray that our “kinsmen according to the flesh will be saved” (Rom. 9:1-3). Is the same true of you?<sup>17</sup>

### 3) PERSONAL CONFIRMATION

In a variety of ways, each of Grace's three founding pastors have experienced the confirming hand of the Lord leading his family to be involved in the planting of Grace Church.

#### PASTOR NATHAN SAWYER

*“My wife, April, and I had talked on numerous occasions about church-planting. When we initially began praying with the other pastors of Grace in*

<sup>17</sup> The third main factor that lead to Grace's establishment falls under the banner “Personal Confirmation,” and is elaborated upon in the Appendix.

*September 2003 about the possibility of planting, it appeared that starting a new church would soon prove to be the Lord's good pleasure for our life. However, because clear direction remained uncertain, our meeting and praying together came to a halt in 2004.*

*April and I, though, believe it was during that following year—for us, a probing and searching year—when the Lord really refined in us His desires and was fashioning us to plant Grace Church. The final pieces of the Lord's confirmation began coming to fruition in April 2005 when April and I were in Richmond, Virginia at the International Mission Board's Candidate Conference. We were there skimming through nearly 1000 job descriptions related to the possibility of serving as overseas missionaries. One request had even been submitted ‘suggesting’ we serve as the University minister in Botswana, Africa. But, prior to leaving for Virginia, we were seeking to discern the Lord's direction, and prayed that He would keep us in America if He desired that we help plant a church that would be best served if we did not wait two years until we returned from the mission-field.*

*While at the candidate conference, I received a providentially timed invitation to reconsider planting a church with the original team that met for prayer in 2003. For us, the Lord's leading then became clear. One of the clearest verses the Lord initially used in August 2003—and has continued to work in my heart—is Philippians 2:13; ‘For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.’ Oh, may it be Lord!”*

## PASTOR BRYAN SMITH

*"My wife, Angie, and I were living contently in Woodlawn, AR, which is her hometown. I had been serving there as a youth pastor of a small rural church for nine years. We had often thought of church planting but saw neither the means to pursue that avenue, nor the Lord steering us any particular direction to fulfill such hopes.*

*Even though no clear direction was gained after several prayer meetings related to church planting in 2003, Angie and I continued to converse about church planting as a family. A few weeks prior to Jordan being invited to participate in Bethlehem's Church Planting Residency, Angie communicated her desire to plant with the Thomas family, and this stemming from a personal devotion time in Genesis 12, Abraham's calling from God. Only days before, I read the same account in Hebrews 11 where God was pleased with Abraham's faith to willingly and obediently go to an unknown land. Angie and I conversed that evening with much hope and expectation at the prospect of serving in a new church plant. After receiving the invitation to plant alongside Jordan and his family, we soon realized God's call was sure. God graciously strengthened my heart to pastor His people by allowing me to serve as the interim pastor of our church in Woodlawn prior to moving to Memphis to help plant Grace Church."*

## PASTOR JORDAN THOMAS

*"Several factors stand out to me among the many confirming evidences the Lord used to indicate that He was leading us to plant Grace Church in downtown Memphis.*

*Before Tracy and I were married, as we would talk about our future together, we began to sense what would later mature into a full-fledged burden to pray about and pursue church planting. As the years of praying unfolded, our sense of the Lord's calling to serve as a planter in His vineyard became increasingly clear and compelling. Trusted counsel from godly and respected influences also yielded a confirming sense that the Lord may be pleased to use us in the labor of church planting.*

*Most compellingly though, the ongoing and growing affirmation of the Spirit of the Lord that continued to rise through our personal devotional life is what ultimately gave us the clarity and the confidence to move forward in faith that God was already at work."*

# SHAPING INFLUENCES

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You can often learn a lot about a people based on knowing who has had the biggest impact on their lives. We tend to emulate those from whom we learn. In addition to the things already mentioned in this resource, below are some of the key influences on the pastors of Grace Church.

1. The awareness that nearly every New Testament letter was written to a relatively new church has fostered confidence that God desires for every church—even churches as young as Grace—to excel deeply in His gospel grace! See Romans!!
2. Godly friends and family members, most especially each pastor's wife.
3. Grace-filled men who have discipled our pastors in the Christian faith; especially Clyde Buren Cranford (d. 2001).
4. The multitude of resources from 9Marks.
5. Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN. Especially; the Treasuring Christ Together Network, and Grace's sister TCT churches.
- 6 Christ Church, New Albany, MS. We are thankful

that the Lord has allowed us to observe this Christ-centered congregation and to learn from our brothers and sisters there.

7. The Christ-centered vision of God's grandeur trumpeted through International Awakening Ministries, Wheaton, IL has also been beneficial to us in the formation of Grace Church.

8. Grace has benefitted from our partnerships with the Southern Baptist Convention, especially the churches in which several of our pastors were reared, and a number of local SBC pastors, and ministers from other denominations, with whom we meet monthly for fellowship in the Word and prayer.

9. We are no doubt indebted deeply to many mentors, disciple-makers, books, resources, professors and the countless choice leaders of God's gracious purposes throughout Christian history. We humbly recognize that our task is neither new nor novel, but rather to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

## RECOMMENDED SERMONS

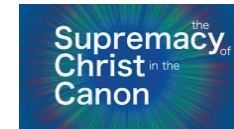
While we *do not* expect any new member to "catch up" with everything that has happened in Grace's history, we do think there are several resources from our past that would benefit anyone who is added from this time forward.

### THREE RECOMMENDED SERMON SERIES

Early in Grace's life, the Lord used three brief sermon series to significantly shape the life of our faith family. We believe these sermons would greatly benefit any who are considering membership. Through them we hope you will gain an even better understanding of the heart of Grace Church and more importantly, true Christianity.

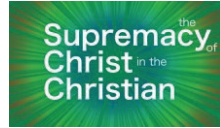
These three sermon series' reveal that the Bible, the Christian life, and the church, are all designed to reveal the glory of God in Christ.

#### 1. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE CANON:



<http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com/posts/series/christ-centered-theology-of-bible>

## 2. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN:



<http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com/posts/series/supremacy-of-jesus-in-the-christian-life>

## 3. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE LOCAL CHURCH:



<http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com/posts/series/the-supremacy-of-jesus-in-the-local-church>

# MEMBERSHIP INTRODUCTION FORM

## EXAMPLE OF INTRO FORM<sup>18</sup>

*Local church membership is one of life's most important decisions. Church membership provides God's people with the nurturing care of a congregation, as well as a context for every member to minister to the body according to the will and pleasure of God. At Grace Church, there are three stages to pursuing membership.*

- Stage #1 – Introduce
- Stage #2 – Acquaint
- Stage #3 – Covenant

*How Membership Happens at Grace:*

*Completing and submitting this form is the first stage in pursuing membership in Grace Church. Thank you for taking time to introduce yourself!*

*Stage two includes participation in Foundations of Grace, our pre-membership seminar, Starting Point, and having a Share & Care with two of our elders. The seminar*

<sup>18</sup> Our *Member Introduction Form* is available at Grace's website, as well as the Sunday resource table. It is included here for you to have an opportunity to see it and ask any questions about it during the *Foundations* seminar.

will provide you with the information necessary to pray about covenant membership in Grace Church, and the talk with our elders will afford you the opportunity to ask any further questions and let our leaders know how to care for your soul. Often it is necessary for more than one Share & Care talk.

Upon satisfactory completion of the first two stages, the elders will recommend individuals to the congregation as candidates for covenant membership, which is the third and final stage of pursuing membership.

We look forward to worshipping the Lord as we read your introduction. Thanks again for taking time to introduce yourself to us!

For the glory of Christ and the good of His bride,  
Ephesians 3:21  
The elders of Grace Church

### I. Personal Spiritual History

Please tell us about your conversion:

Describe your relationship with Lord in the last six months.

Have you been baptized after your conversion? If so, by what mode? (Sprinkling, pouring, christening, immersion, etc...).

At what church were you baptized?

### II. Doctrinal Questionnaire

Have you read the Grace Church Member Affirmation of Faith (available at [www.gracechurchmemphis.com](http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com) or on the Resource Table)?

If so, do you believe and embrace these Articles of Faith? Which Articles do you have questions about, or disagree with? What are your questions and/or disagreements? Have you read the Grace Church Covenant (Available at [www.gracechurchmemphis.com](http://www.gracechurchmemphis.com) or on the Resource Table)?

If so, do you personally embrace these covenant commitments?

Please explain or discuss the portion(s) about which you have questions or disagreement.

### III. Practical Questionnaire

Would you share why you sense the Lord is leading you toward membership in Grace Church? How long have you been attending Grace Church? Given the opportunity, what would you change about Grace Church? (We appreciate the help that we have received from this question in the past!).

Have you attended our Foundations of Grace Seminar (a prerequisite to membership)? If so, when?

### IV. Personal Church History

Please list the last several churches where you have been a member, or have attended regularly.

Please supply your previous pastor's name and a number where we may reach him:

### V. Church Discipline & Spiritual History

Are you currently, or have you ever been, under any level of church discipline at any church? If so, please explain the situation. Has this issue been fully resolved?

*Have you ever been united to any form of cult? (Masonic Lodge, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, the Church of Christ, et al). If yes, please explain below.*

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VI. Help Us Seek Godly Counsel

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*Could you list at least three other Christians—other than current members of Grace Church—who would affirm your faith in Christ and recommend you for membership in Grace Church?*

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VII. Personal Contact Information

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*Our elders will use the contact information provided below to arrange your Share & Care. Please provide an email address and phone number.*

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VIII. Share & Care Options

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*Share & Care talks usually take place in your home. Please indicate below all of the available Tuesday, Thursday or Sunday afternoons or evenings in the next four weeks.*

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IX. Missionary Living

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*Our prayer is that every member of Grace Church understands that he or she is a full-time missionary. In that light, we would like to join you in praying for at least five lost people the Lord has put in your life as you seek to reach them for Christ.*