



NEXT STEPS

A SHORT PRE-MEMBERSHIP COURSE FOR
GRACE CHRISTIAN CHURCH BUDERIM

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With grateful thanks to those who have contributed material for this book or allowed us to borrow from them, and to the Lord God and Father of our saviour Jesus Christ who continues to work in and through his church here in Buderim.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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 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. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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 4:11–16 ESV)

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Introduction

Welcome to our pre-membership course, *Next Steps*. This course is designed to help you take the next steps of commitment to Grace Christian Church Buderim (WPC) as your church family, by helping you learn what we believe, and what values and purpose we are committed to.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

- (1 Corinthians 12:27 ESV)



Sessions

This course takes place over four group-contact sessions, with each session focussing on an important area of the character and life of our church.

- 1. Gospel**
- 2. Teaching**
- 3. Church**
- 4. Community**

Throughout the course, you will be able to ask plenty of questions, and interact with others attending the course.

Once you have completed all four sessions of *Next Steps*, if you wish, you may schedule a membership interview with the elders, with a view to becoming a formal church member at our next Membership Sunday.

There is no pressure to become a member once you have completed the course. You are welcome to attend the course purely for your own interest.

Why Church Membership?

To be a member of a church is to make a public promise to live according to the Word and to support the work of the local church. In the Bible this is called a ‘covenant’. Every believer is part of the church as *organism* (the Spiritual Body of Christ), but only by a public promise can you be part of the church as *organisation*. A public promise, or covenant, is the basis for all society, according to the Bible: marriage, employment, citizenship, church membership, etc., are all relationships of accountability.

Membership in a church is not like membership in a social club or other organisations. Most organisation members are consumers; the organisation exists to serve them. Christ’s Church is a completely different community — membership means ministry and service, going from being a consumer to becoming a provider of God’s love and care to others. At Grace, we take seriously that we are a church not for ourselves, but for others.

We therefore encourage all those who call Grace their church home to formally become members.

Biblical Reasons for Joining A Church

There is no ‘chapter-and-verse’ in the Bible about church membership, but there is a Biblical rationale for formal membership:

“Church” in the New Testament usually meant a specific local church like that at Ephesus or Corinth. But did people formally join local churches, or was it an informal association?

There are indications of formal relationship to a church in the New Testament:

1. The instructions for pastoral oversight and spiritual leadership

Pastors/overseers/shepherds were to care for “*all the flock*” (see Acts 20:28. *cf.* 1 Timothy 3:5, Philippians 1:1). Leaders of the citywide churches

must have had some 'listing' of believers. Since leaders were accountable for the souls of the flock under their care (see Hebrews 13:17), they must have had some commitment for care.

2. The instructions for church discipline

Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 talk about putting a person out of the church (*"Let him who has done this be removed from among you"*) and treating him like an unbeliever. Since unbelievers/outsideers were welcome at worship, removal must have indicated a distinct formal *dissociation*.

In the New Testament there is no such person as a Christian who is not a church member. Conversion was described as *"the Lord adding to the church"* (see Acts 2:47). There was no 'drifting' into the fellowship of the church.

Benefits of Membership

There are a number of benefits to becoming a formal member of a church:

1. Receiving the care of, and being accountable to, spiritual leaders

Every believer must *"obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls"* (Hebrews 13:17 ESV). This command assumes that you have a formal relationship with certain spiritual leaders. They are responsible for you and you to them.

Some people may say, "I am accountable only to God." Ultimately, only God has authority over you. However, the Bible (in the passage above and elsewhere) clearly teaches that God has placed leaders over Christ's church to exercise this accountability under him.

Additionally, the reality of sin should sober us about making ourselves the sole judges over our own hearts, *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah. 17:9). Hebrews 3:13 says we need others to exhort us "daily" so we do not become hardened by sin.

2. The church's structures and guidelines to shape the ministry of the congregation

Members choose Elders who guide the direction of the congregation. Elders are elected (Acts 6:1-6), by “the people.” Formal membership entitles you to voting rights within the government of our church. While congregational meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, only members may pass resolutions, vote for changes to the Constitution or nominate and elect the elders. Members officially call the pastors to the work of the church and vote to receive the annual budget from the Session.

Also, certain ministries are open only to members, such as serving as an elder or deacon, and most teaching ministries.

Ultimately Jesus established the church to be a public, earthly institution that would mark out, affirm, and oversee those who profess to believe in him (see Matthew. 16:18-19, 18:15-20). Jesus established the church to publicly display to the world those who belong to him, in order that the good news about himself is made known (see John 17:21, 23; see *also* Ephesians 3:10).

Membership Pathway

This is how you may become a formal member at Grace Christian Church Buderim:

1. Attend Grace

We recommend that prospective members attend Grace worship services, a Grace Community Group, Grow @ Grace and other ministries for approximately six months before considering membership. This gives you a chance to get to know us, and us a chance to get to know you.



2. Join a Next Steps course

Sign up to join the next *Next Steps* pre-membership course. These courses are run twice annually over four consecutive weekly sessions to outline to prospective members what we believe as a church, as well as our values, character and history as a church.

There are opportunities at these sessions to interact and ask questions.

3. Apply to become a member

After completing all four sessions of *Next Steps*, complete a Membership Application Form (available here:

<http://gracechurchbuderim.com.au/contact-us/membership-application/>). Either complete the form online, or print it and return it to the church office.

4. Meet with elders

The elders will receive your application at the next monthly session meeting, and two elders will be appointed to meet with you personally. At this meeting, you will be asked about your own story of coming to faith in Jesus Christ, your understanding of the gospel message, your church background, why you left your previous church (if any), whether or not you have been baptised, etc.

You will also have the opportunity to ask other questions you may have about the church and its ministries.

The elders will then report back to the session at the next monthly meeting.

On rare occasions, the elders may request a follow-up meeting to clarify and expand on the conversation of the first meeting, or they may recommend deferring your membership for a period to help you work through an issue that's come up during the meetings.

5. Be publicly received

At set times through the year, we receive new members at our Sunday worship services, preferably on those Sundays where the Lord's Supper is celebrated. Usually a group of people will be received together, and people are received at the service they usually attend.

At the service, the person leading will read from the Bible and make a brief explanation about church membership.

Some of those who are being received will also present their testimony of coming to faith in Jesus Christ (with prior warning and preparation!).

Those being received will then come forward together and publicly agree to the membership vows of Grace Christian Church Buderim, read out by the leader.

The person leading will then welcome them into membership, and pray for them.

Each person being received into membership will receive a membership certificate.

Reception into membership takes place before the celebration of the Lord's Supper so that the congregation and the new members can gather at the table together to express their unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Membership Vows

These are the membership vows of Grace Christian Church.

1. I believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation.

This vow affirms that your foundation is the same as the church's foundation – the true Word of God. This vow also affirms that there is only ONE way of salvation, revealed in the Bible.

2. I confess that because of my sinfulness I abhor and humble myself before God and trust Him for salvation not in myself but in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

This vow affirms that you recognise how your sin makes you unworthy of God's love, and that your salvation is through his grace shown in Jesus Christ alone. It also affirms your intention to live a repentant life.

3. I acknowledge Jesus Christ as my sovereign Lord and I promise to rely on the grace of God and serve Him in whatever way I am able.

This affirms that Jesus isn't just your Saviour but also the Lord of your life, to whom you willingly submit in all things. Because we cannot obey the Lord in our own strength this promise affirms that we can only do so through relying on the grace of God. This is also a vow about serving God with the

time, talents and treasure that God has given to us, and being a contributor to the life of Christ's church, rather than a consumer.

4. I agree to submit to the Lord, to the government of this church and to heed its Biblical discipline should the occasion arise.

This vow is based upon the teaching of Hebrews 13:17 which says,

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

This is not supposed to be an oppressive vow, but a positive vow, where you consciously put yourself in a place of spiritual protection and care.

Notes

Session 01: Gospel

The first thing we need to be clear about is the message of the Bible, and the reason we are Christians in the first place.



“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

- (John 3:16 ESV)

1. God

The message of the Bible, the gospel, begins with God. He is the eternal, sovereign and unchangeable Father of everything (see [Psalm 90:2](#)). God created the world by speaking his word of authority into the nothingness, and creation obeyed by coming into existence (see [Genesis 1:1-3](#)).

God is the source and perfection of goodness, love, mercy (see [Exodus 34:6](#), [Psalm 100:5](#)), holiness, righteousness, justice (see [Deuteronomy 32:4](#)), wisdom, power (see [Psalm 47:5](#), [Romans 16:27](#)), truth and grace (see [1 Peter 5:10](#)).

God is a personal god, who reveals himself to the world through his creation (see [Romans 1:19-20](#)), and through his Word, and in his Son, Jesus (see [Hebrews 1:1-3a](#)).

2. Humanity

God created humanity in his image, as the crowning glory of his creation (see [Genesis 1:26-27](#)).

Humanity was created to exercise authority over God's creation under his sovereignty (see [Genesis 1:28](#), [Psalm 8:5](#)), and to fill the earth with more 'image-bearers' (see [Genesis 1:28](#)).

Human beings are able to have a unique and special relationship with God (see [Psalm 8:3-4](#)), but they are also responsible to God, to obey him and submit to him (see [Genesis 2:15-17](#)), as creature to Creator.

3. Sin

Everything was created “very good” (see [Genesis 1:31](#)). But God also placed a requirement on the people he had created: that they should not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (see [Genesis 2:16-17](#)).

This command, or ‘law’ of God was broken when Satan tempted the woman to eat the fruit from the Tree, and she in turn enticed the man to do the same (see [Genesis 3:1-13](#)).

This is when sin entered the world, and ever since, sin has been part of the very nature of humanity. Since this first sin, every person in history has been born with a natural inclination to rebel against God and reject his rule over them (see [Romans 3:10-18, 23](#)). Sin has broken the relationship between Creator and creature (see [Genesis 3:22-24](#)), and has even affected creation itself (see [Romans 8:20-22](#)).

Furthermore, God’s holiness and righteousness means that he has to act against sin. He cannot leave it alone, or ignore it. If he did that, he would be less than God (see [Exodus 32:18-23](#)).

This means that human beings like you and I deserve nothing more from God than his perfect and righteous judgement against our sin (see [Romans 6:23a](#), [Hebrews 9:27](#)).

This would be the sad end of the story, if it wasn’t for God’s perfect love and mercy, which made him send Jesus into the world.

4. Jesus

Jesus is really and fully God, but is distinct from the Father. He came to earth as a real and complete human being, born as a baby to a virgin mother, being conceived in her by the Holy Spirit (see [Matthew 1:18](#)). Being God, Jesus was completely sinless (see [1 Peter 2:22](#)).

Jesus grew up, and as an adult was baptised by John the Baptist. At his baptism, God declared in a voice from heaven that Jesus was his Son, and that he was

pleased with him. Jesus was also anointed with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (see Luke 3:21-22).

This marked the beginning of Jesus' formal ministry. He was first tempted by Satan in the desert for forty days and nights, but he didn't give in (see Mark 1:12-13).

He then travelled around first-century Palestine teaching about the kingdom of God and performing miracles (see Matthew 4:23).

After three years, he was falsely accused, arrested, and executed on a Roman cross, under the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders (see John 19:14-19).

Three days later, he rose again from the dead, and appeared to his followers (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-7). After a further forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven, appointing his disciples as his witness into all the world, and promised that he would return the same way he had departed (see Acts 1:1-10).

Jesus reveals God to the world (see John 14:6-7). He is "God for man". In this capacity, he teaches with the authority of God, explaining and fulfilling the Old Testament scriptures. He performs miracles, demonstrating his divine power over nature, illness and disease, evil spirits and even death.

Jesus also identifies with and represents humanity. He is "man for God". In this capacity, he lives a human life, with all the struggles and temptations we face, but remains sinless (see Hebrews 4:15). He goes to the cross and dies, taking on himself the sins of humanity and being punished in our place (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). He then rises from the dead, breaking the power of death, and confirming that his sacrifice at the cross has been sufficient to break the power of sin and to satisfy God's justice.

5. Response

Forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus is not automatic, and is not given to all people. It requires the response of faith (see Romans 3:21-25)

This faith is given by God to his chosen people as the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts (see Ephesians 2:8-9), and normally comes about through hearing and understanding the Bible (which is also a gift of God, see Romans 10:17).

Those who place their faith in Jesus' saving work receive forgiveness, those who do not are held responsible, before God, for their own sin (see John 3:36).

God is patient now, giving time for all people everywhere to place their faith in Jesus. But there will come a time when he will judge everyone, and it will be too late to be saved (see Acts 17:30-31).

A response of faith in Jesus is followed by a response of repentance (see Acts 2:38, 26:20). Once forgiven, the life of a believer is characterised by a continual turning away from sin. This is because the power of sin over us is broken, and the Spirit of God now lives within us — the same Spirit who generates faith and repentance in the life of the believer (see Romans 6:12-14).

6. Judgement

There will come a day when God will judge the living and the dead according to their works (see 1 Corinthians 4:5, 1 2 Timothy 4:1, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 20:11-15).

On this day, those who have faith in Jesus will rise to eternal life, and those who do not have faith in Jesus will face eternal condemnation and punishment (see Mark 9:47-48, Revelation 20:10, 14).

Questions for Reflection

- How did you become a Christian?
- How would you explain the gospel to an unbelieving friend or family member?

Notes

Session 02: Teaching

1. The Bible

The Bible is the living Word of God (see Hebrews 4:12), in which the Lord has revealed everything necessary for his own glory, our salvation in Jesus, faith and life (see 2 Timothy 3:14-17). The Holy Spirit applies God's Word to our hearts and minds, giving us understanding and insight (see 1 Corinthians 2:12-13), but he does not reveal anything more than what God has already revealed in the Bible (see Galatians 1:8-9).

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”



- (Hebrews 4:12 ESV)

Because the Bible is God's Word, it is without error, and does not contradict itself. But that doesn't mean everything in the Bible is easy to understand. Prayerful reliance on God for his Spirit's help, as well as careful study, reflection and meditation on God's Word is essential to understand and apply it correctly.

Here at Grace, this is our conviction. That is why so much of our time spent together in worship services and home groups is focussed on studying the Bible. We set apart pastors to study, preach and teach the Bible as a full-time job (see Acts 6:4, 1 Timothy 4:13).

We believe that God speaks today, and that he speaks through his living Word.

2. The Westminster Confession of Faith

In England, in 1643, the Parliament called "an Assembly of learned and godly Divines, and others", and instructed them "to meet and assemble themselves at Westminster, in the Chapel called King Henry the VII's Chapel".

This Assembly's task was to deal with matters concerning the liturgy, discipline, government, and doctrine of the Church of England. From its deliberations there

came in 1647 the extensive and detailed Westminster Confession of Faith, described as "a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland".



It is immensely important to understand, from this last statement, that the Westminster Confession of Faith does not represent the theological speculation of a tiny and eccentric minority. Westminster Presbyterian Church, by employing the Confession as a statement of Christian truth, makes use of a major ecumenical theological document of the Protestant reformation and, in so doing, affirms its glad submission to the supreme authority of God's Word and to the doctrines inherent in that Word.

Therefore, although, as we have said, WPC is organisationally quite young, what it teaches is firmly within the main stream of those truths of the Bible that were revealed afresh, after centuries of obscurity and superstition, in the Reformation.

3. Distinctives

These points explain some of the particular values and convictions of Grace and the WPC. They may be different (or emphasise Biblical ideas differently) to other churches you've been part of. Feel free to ask lots of questions!

1. *On being 'Reformed'*

We sometimes refer to our church tradition or church culture as being "Reformed". Simply, this means that we follow in the same convictions of those who led the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century -- people like Martin Luther and John Calvin. (The Reformation was a movement which responded to the theological and political corruption of the Roman Catholic Church). These convictions are sometimes summarised by what's called '*The Five Solas*'. ('Sola' is a Latin word which means or "alone", kind of like the word "solo").

Scripture Alone ('Sola Scriptura') This means that the Bible alone is our ultimate authority, because it is God's Word. Final authority can't come from tradition, church leaders, personal revelations or feelings.

Christ Alone ('Solus Christus') This means that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross alone is sufficient to pay the price for our sins to God. Nothing can be added to what Jesus has already done to secure our salvation, such as good deeds or religious performance.

Grace Alone ('Sola Gratia') This means that we are saved only by God graciously giving us what we do not deserve. We do not earn our salvation. All that we deserve from God is his judgement on our sin, and on our own we are incapable of even reaching out to him for salvation.

Faith Alone ('Sola Fide') This means that we are made acceptable in God's sight only through faith, not through our own efforts. We cannot be justified before our Creator and Judge except by placing our total trust in what Jesus has done, and which God has promised is sufficient to save us. Remember too, even our faith is a gift of grace from God.

God's Glory Alone ('Soli Deo Gloria') This means God that reveals himself in his Word, sends his own Son to pay the price for sin, shows us grace, and justifies us by faith rather than deeds is all to show how great he is. He does it all for his own glory.

These five points were made in response to major errors in the teaching of the Roman Catholic church at the time. Another way of summarising the Reformed tradition is through what's called '*The Doctrines of Grace*', which came about in response to a disagreement among certain Protestant groups about how we are saved. They are:

Total Depravity, which means that we are all guilty before God, that sin has affected every aspect of who we are, and therefore we are undeserving of his love (see Romans 3:10-12, 23).

Unconditional Election, which means that nothing in us causes God to choose to save us — not our good deeds nor our religiosity makes us deserve to be saved (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Instead, God chooses to save whom he chooses, by his own divine prerogative (see Ephesians 1:3-7).

Limited (or Definite) Atonement, which means that Christ's death on the cross wasn't for anyone and everyone, but only those whom God specifically chooses to save. In this way, Jesus' sacrifice is absolutely

sufficient to pay for the sins of those God has chosen to save (see John 10:14-15, 25-26)

Irresistible Grace, which means that if God has chosen to show grace in saving a sinner in Christ, that person cannot reject or respond negatively to that grace. God always hits his mark (see John 6:37, 44, 64-65)

Perseverance of the Saints, which means that if God saves someone, they cannot, in their own power, undo their salvation. We are kept by Jesus for eternity. (see Romans 8:38-39)

By now you should be able to see that the basic foundation of “being Reformed” is the conviction of the absolute and total sovereignty of God in all things, and that all things ultimately work to glorify him.

2. Baptism

Baptism is a sign and seal of God’s covenant of grace given to his people. Washing with water in baptism is an act of faith in God’s promises for his people, and of identifying with them.

Though baptism is a very special event, it doesn’t save or even change anyone. Only God can do that by his Holy Spirit working in a person’s life (see Mark 1:8).

We believe in the baptism of believers. This is the clear teaching of Jesus (see Matthew 28:19).

We also believe the Bible’s teaching that the children of believing parents should be baptised (see Acts 2:38-39). When a child is presented for baptism by believing parents, they are trusting that as their child is born into the family of God’s people, they will receive God’s special grace through Christian teaching and example that may result, in time and by the Lord’s wisdom and grace, in that child’s salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 7:13-14).

In this way, baptism replaces the sign of circumcision in the Old Testament (see Colossians 2:11-12). In the Old Testament, those who wished to identify with God’s people and come under his Law would be circumcised. Also, those children born

into God's chosen nation were circumcised in faith towards God's promises to his people, and as a way of identifying with his people.

Despite being circumcised, that child would still require a personal relationship with God (see Deuteronomy 10:6). For those baptised as children, we pray that they would respond to God's special grace to them, having being born into a Christian family, and at some point make a personal and public declaration of faith in Jesus.

For the baptised child, born into God's family, born to parents who trust God's promises towards his people in the Lord Jesus, we pray that they may never know a day when God was not their Father, and when Jesus was not their Lord and Saviour.

For this reason, we tend not to refer to "adult" baptism, or "infant" baptism, even "believers'" baptism; instead, we tend to talk about "covenant baptism", trusting in God's covenant promises to his people.

For more on baptism, see Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch28.

3. The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a special act of worship, commanded by Jesus, for Christians to participate in together (see Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).



In the Lord's Supper, we drink grape juice (used at Grace as a non-alcoholic alternative to wine) and we eat bread. The grape juice symbolises the blood of Jesus, which sealed the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins by his sacrifice on the cross (see Matthew 26:28). The bread symbolises the body of Jesus, which was broken for us,

taking the punishment we deserved for sin and satisfying God's anger at our sin (see Luke 22:19).

The bread and grape juice do not become real flesh and real blood in any sense. (In this regard, we believe the traditional Roman Catholic belief in 'transubstantiation')

contradicts both the Bible and the basic physics of God's creation, see 1 Corinthians 10:15).

Even so, the Lord's Supper is not just a bare memorial. Jesus is present with us in a special way at the his table. And though the bread and grape juice remain real bread and real grape juice, as we partake of them physically, by faith we partake spiritually in Jesus' body and blood and all that they mean to nourish our souls and strengthen us for our onward journey to heaven (see 1 Corinthians 10:3-4, 16).

The Heidelberg Catechism puts this really well: *"First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely was his body offered for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and the cup of the Lord as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely does he himself nourish and refresh my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood."* (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 28 Q.75)

Only those trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation before God should partake in the Lord's Supper. For this reason, those visitors coming to the table with us should at least be baptised, but preferably also be a member or active attendee, in good standing, of another Bible-believing church.

Also, those coming to the table should not be living in unrepentant sin (e.g., sexual immorality, unforgiveness, etc.). To do so is hypocrisy, and God takes that very seriously. This must be dealt with before God before taking the outward signs of his grace and of belonging to his people (see 1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

This is not to say that only those who are perfect may come to partake in the Lord's Supper. It is a means to strengthen those who know they need God's grace through Jesus to sustain them until they see him in glory.

For more on The Lord's Supper, see Westminster Confession of Faith Ch29.

A note on kids and the Lord's Supper: Our Book of Church Order states that "children are not entitled ... to partake of the communion until they are fully able to obey the command of self-examination as given in 1 Corinthians 11:28." (BCO 3.3.02) During services of the Lord's Supper, we urge parents to disciple their children to understand what the Supper means, and what it means to examine oneself in order to approach the Table rightly.

4. *Marriage*

Marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman, established by God at Creation as part of his design for his world (see Genesis 2:23-24, Matthew 19:4-6). The Bible also defines male and female as the only two sexes/genders, which do not change (see Genesis 1:27). Both sexes/genders are distinct in their created roles, and are made equally in the image of God.

God designed marriage so that men and woman, in an exclusive and lifelong physical relationship, may serve his mandate for humanity to “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion [over it]*” (see Genesis 1:28). In marriage, men and women may serve God in his world in the unique roles he has created them to fulfil. They may manage and care for his creation, and fill the earth with more “image bearers”.

Therefore, in marriage, children may be born and raised in the knowledge of God and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the hope that they may turn to him in personal faith. In marriage, God-given physical desires may be enjoyed within the safe relationship that God has designed.

For more on Marriage, see Westminster Confession of Faith Ch24

5. *Male Leadership*

The Bible teaches that only God-called and gifted men are to hold positions of spiritual leadership within the church (see 1 Timothy 2:11-14, 3:1-2, and Titus 1:5-6).

This is a reflection of the original created order (see 1 Timothy 2:13). However, it does not diminish the value and worth of a woman under God, as one who is made equally in the image of God (see Genesis 1:26-27). Women are made for a different role (see 1 Timothy 2:15, which recognises how the unique female role of childbirth was essential to God’s salvation plan through the Lord Jesus, i.e., that even Jesus had a mother!).

Here at Grace (and in all WPC churches), we apply this principle by only admitting men to the offices of Elder (both Teaching and Ruling) and Deacon. Those who teach the Word, either by preaching during services or teaching in a mixed Grace Community Group, are also required to be men.

We welcome the ministry and service of women in our congregation. There are many opportunities for women to serve, even in teaching roles, such as leading a women's Grace Community Group (see Titus 2:3-5), reading the Bible one-to-one with other women, or teaching at Sunday School, Play Group, or Friday Kids' Club and Youth.

6. *Spiritual Gifts*

The Bible teaches that God has blessed each member of his church with special gifts that are given for building up the church (see 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:4-7). Though certain people are called to formal roles in the ministry of the church (e.g., elders, deacons), they are to work to equip, enable and encourage the New Testament ideal of every member of the body doing their work of ministry, and building up the body of Christ (see Ephesians 4:7-13).

In the New Testament, there appear to be two broad categories of spiritual gifts: those of speaking, and those of serving. However, the New Testament doesn't provide an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts. No gift is above another — what matters is that the gift is directed towards God's glory (see 1 Peter 4:10-11).

Like many of the Lord's blessings, spiritual gifts may be abused. Specific warnings about the abuse of spiritual gifts include

- a) The loveless use of spiritual gifts (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-13)
- b) Failing to build up the church with the use of gifts (see 1 Corinthians 14:6-12)
- c) Lack of proper focus leading to chaos in worship (see 1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

7. *Evangelism*

Jesus commands his followers to spread the good news of salvation in his name (see Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). This gospel is powerful to save (see Romans 1:16).

This was normal in the early church (see The Book of Acts). The ordinary means God uses to bring people to faith in Jesus is through hearing the Word spoken by his people (see Romans 10:13-17).



Though the Bible teaches clearly that God draws to himself those he will save, this doesn't mean we just sit back and wait for him to fill our church! We have a responsibility to be an active part of God's salvation plan by being the means of proclaiming the gospel to the world.

Every Christian that has had a personal experience of coming to faith in Jesus knows what to tell another person about him. Your own testimony is a great place to start.

Questions for Reflection

- The Bible is complete and authoritative as the Word of God, so why do you think a document like the Westminster Confession of Faith may be helpful or useful as a summary of the teaching of the Bible?
- What do you perceive are your spiritual gifts, and how might you use them to build up the body of Christ?

Notes

Session 03: Church

1. Church - the Bible's model for Christian community

God saves people, through Jesus Christ, into a community of people (see [1 Peter 2:9-10](#)). The normal expression of belonging to God through Jesus Christ is that of also belonging to his people. Note: the church is not a building, it's a group of people!

All through the Bible, the idea of God saving a people for himself is key. This is seen when God saves Noah and his family from the flood (see Genesis), when he calls Abraham and promises that through his family he would bless the world, and when he calls Israel out of slavery in Egypt to establish them in his Promised Land.



“...to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

- (*Ephesians 3:21 ESV*)

2. Presbyterian - a form of church leadership

By history and tradition, Christian churches tend to unite around an emphasis on certain understandings of the Bible's teaching, usually on secondary issues not essential to the gospel like church government or how baptism is done. This is why the church expresses itself in different “denominations”, e.g., Presbyterian, Baptism, Anglican, Brethren, Uniting, etc.

Presbyterian churches are governed by men who are called presbyters or elders. They may also be called bishops, because a New Testament bishop is the same as a New Testament elder. Variations occur within Presbyterian government. Some forms are more centralised than others.

Some make a sharp distinction between a "minister" and an elder", and hold to the "three-office" position of minister, elder, and deacon. Others, such as WPC, adopt

the "two-office" position, of elder and deacon, while recognising that within the eldership there are men specially gifted of God for the ministry of teaching and preaching. Though elders may differ as to function there is complete parity as to authority.

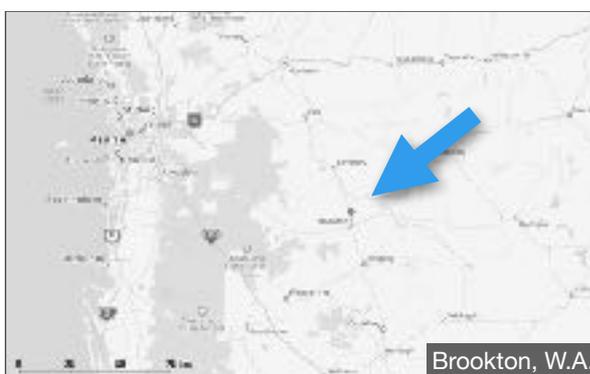
In Westminster Presbyterian Church, government by elders occurs at three levels: the local church's council of elders (the "session"); the regional council of elders (the "presbytery") consisting of elders from several churches in an area; the national assembly, consisting of elders nominated by the presbyteries to meet as "commissioners". The presbyteries and national assembly are "wider" rather than "higher" assemblies, with a heavy "grass-roots" emphasis. Local churches own their properties.

The fundamental principle at work is cooperation, not coercion. Nevertheless, it is understood that all the assemblies of elders — the sessions, the presbyteries, and the national assembly — are parts of the one government, reflecting the unity of the church under Christ the Head.

3. Westminster - the character and history of the WPC

Behind the formation of the first WPC congregation in Western Australia in 1970 lay many years of devoted service by Miss Mary Jones amongst Aboriginal people in Brookton and nearby towns.

Miss Jones was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Though her work was independent of any connection with a church or a mission society she wanted it to be established as an evangelical Presbyterian work.



Extensive correspondence with World Presbyterian Missions, the mission arm of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), in the USA, led eventually to the arrival in 1970 of the Revd David Cross and his wife, Barbara, to commence 10 years of church-planting in W.A. Mr Cross worked in Brookton and other country

areas. He also commenced Bible studies in the Perth metropolitan area at the request of several families of mixed denominational backgrounds and took up residence there.

Out of these Bible studies, in late 1970, came the first congregation with the name, "Westminster Presbyterian Church". No rapid spurts of growth occurred in the 1970s, but by 1981 five WPC congregations in Western Australia agreed to form a presbytery and to move to incorporation as a denomination. The elders compiled a Book of Church Order and a denominational Constitution, and on the basis of these documents incorporation was effected in 1982. The inclusion of the Brookton Calvary Presbyterian Church meant that in the fledgling denomination that small church of Aboriginal people was the oldest congregation.



Eastern States

In the 1980s and 1990s WPC, aided by church planters from Mission to the World, mission agency of the Presbyterian Church in America (which the RPCES had joined), was enlarged by the establishment of congregations in Queensland, NSW, and Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory. The Queensland churches formed the Presbytery of Queensland, and the churches in NSW and the ACT followed by forming the Presbytery of South East Australia.

National assembly

Just as the formation of several congregations in three regions had led to the establishment of presbyteries in those regions, so the existence of more than one presbytery made it possible to form a synod, or national assembly, and the First Synod of Westminster Presbyterian Church met in Western Australia in January 1990.

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WPC had not been born from any major "split" in the Presbyterian Church in W.A. Though some were well-grounded in the Reformed Faith, many were not, and the WPC elders reached the decision that to do the best for their people they ought to provide ministry to them in a denominational framework that reflected that to which they had already become accustomed in their local congregations. That decision to begin a denominational life as Westminster Presbyterian Church was accompanied by an equally firm decision against assuming a negatively "separatist" stance, and for affirming fellowship with Christians in other denominations.

As stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 26, Of the Communion of Saints: "*All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.*"

4. Grace Christian Church Buderim - A Local Expression of the WPC on the QLD Sunshine Coast

In 1983 Bob and Wendy Burnett offered to be the seed family for a WPC church plant on the Sunshine Coast, and Buderim in particular.

They had been involved with Westminster Presbyterian Church Perth since 1974, and had returned home to the Sunshine Coast in 1979 to be with ageing parents. Bob, who'd served as an elder at WPC Bull Creek, had earlier been asked to become a borrowed elder for the newly established WPC Redbank Plains, necessitating a monthly trip to Redbank Plains.

The Sunshine Coast had a wide variety of churches and denominations, but the Burnetts had found they fitted most comfortably into WPC churches with their grassroots driven government and "warm reformed" approach to theology.

The Queensland Presbytery agreed to begin a Buderim work, though at that stage there was no church planting pastor available. Worship services of Westminster Presbyterian Church Buderim began in March 1983, relying on visiting preachers

from Brisbane and occasional ministry from Bob Burnett. Meetings were held in the CWA room at Buderim Memorial Hall.

In 1984, Pr Sam Larsen, an American church planter with Mission to The World (Presbyterian Church in America), completed an interim ministry with the Redbank Plains Church (RBP had called their own pastor) and moved to Buderim, with his family, to develop the new work.



Reverend Bob Burnett

For a couple of years the church met in the CWA room on Burnett Street, but when Buderim State School built a new hall, the church was given permission to hire the hall for use on Sundays. This meant that the church could commence night services.

Sam Larsen's goals for ministry in Australia included not only church planting, but also helping train local men for pastoral ministry, with the hope and prayer that one of the local men would continue the Buderim work after he returned to the US.

In 1987, Sam and others established Westminster Theological College, and among others, began training two men from the Buderim congregation, Nigel Chalmers and Bob Burnett. Classes were held in Brisbane, employing lecturers from WPC and other denominations, occasionally supplemented by world-recognised (retired) professors from the US who would spend a term or two in Brisbane. Westminster Theological College (later Sunshine Coast Theological College) continued training men for pastoral ministry and providing Bible education to lay people until it finally ceased operations in February 2017.

Land for a church building was bought in the Mons area. Sam Larsen returned the US in early 1989, and the church called Bob Burnett as pastor. Nigel Chalmers went to Perth where he became youth pastor of Bullcreek WPC.

In the late 1990s the leadership began to question the wisdom of building in the Mons region because of its relative isolation. There had been progress towards establishing a university on the Sunshine Coast, and Sippy Downs



Site preparation, c.1991

was one of the prospective sites. The leadership considered Sippy Downs the most likely site, and on that basis, with the approval of the congregation, sold the Mons land and bought land on the corner of Stringybark Road and Toral Drive, Sippy Downs.

One of the church members, Lubert Bosveld, a builder, offered to give the church three months of his time to raise a suitable building. Work commenced in July 1992 and the building was dedicated and in use by November. A few years later the hall was added.

In 2001, the congregation voted to use the name Grace Christian Church Buderim for promotion and advertising purposes, with the intention of being clearer about our values and character to the local community. The name Westminster Presbyterian Church Buderim is still used for official purposes.

In August 2002, the church was destroyed by fire. Though circumstances surrounding the fire were suspicious, the police could find no signs of arson, nor could the church leaders point to any suspect. Following the fire, church services took place at Matthew Flinders Anglican College.



The church was rebuilt, this time with builder Hendrik Kroon (who had worked with Lubert on the first build) as builder, and services recommenced in the renewed building in early 2003. Though the church's insurance didn't meet the cost of reconstruction, due to generous support from church members, other churches, schools and other individuals, we were able to re-enter our premises with only a modest debt.

In 2006, several families from Grace Buderim, along with Pr Dan Bosshard, established the Christian Community Church Pacific Paradise, with the Buderim church subsidising the expenses of the new church for many years.

Rev Bob Burnett retired from ministry at Grace in 2012, and now serves with Grace Presbyterian Church Morayfield (WPC) as 'pastor-at-large', assisting in the ministry at Morayfield and supporting regional ministries in Kilkivan and Monto.

Today Grace enjoys the full-time pastoral ministry of Rev John Owen Butler (who arrived in June 2017 after serving for a number of years with the *Presbyterian Church in America* in Oklahoma, U.S.A), and Rev Clint Lombard (who arrived in 2012 from Cape Town, South Africa, where he had been serving with the *Church of England in South Africa*, now known as *The Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church of South Africa*).



Throughout this time, the Lord has blessed Grace with a reputation on the Sunshine Coast for giving visitors a warm welcome, and for clear, accessible and uncompromising Bible teaching.

Questions for reflection:

- What has your “church history” looked like? What church have you previously been part of?
- How did the character and distinctives of those churches either support or detract from your growth as a follower of Jesus?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Bible-teaching churches in Australia today? How might these be overcome?

Notes

Session 04: Community

When you become a member at Grace Christian Church, you are committing to be part of a community of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

- (1 Corinthians 1:2 ESV)



1. Commitment

Every Christian should join a church because Scripture requires it. Granted, there is no direct command in Scripture that says, “Every Christian must join a local church,” but two factors in Scripture indicate that every Christian should be a member of a local church.

Jesus established the church to be a public, earthly institution that would mark out, affirm, and oversee those who profess to believe in him (see Matthew 16:18-19, 18:15-20). Jesus established the church to publicly declare those who belong to him in order to give the world a display of the good news about himself (see John 17:21, 23; see *also* Ephesians 3:10). Jesus wants the world to know who belongs to him and who doesn't.

How is the world to know who belongs to him and who doesn't? They are to see which people publicly identify themselves with his people in the visible, public institution he established for this very purpose. They're to look at the members of his church.

If some people claim to be part of the universal church even though they belong to no local church, they reject Jesus' plan for them and his church. Jesus intends for his people to be marked out as a visible, public group, which means joining together in local churches.

The New Testament teaches that every Christian should be committed to:

- practice the “one anothers” with the Church
- use his spiritual gifts for the church,
- submit to the leaders of the church,
- discipline the unrepentant in the church, and
- support the mission of the church.

Committed To Practice The ‘One Anothers’ With The Church

In the New Testament letters, there are dozens of “one anothers” commanded of Christians:

1. Rom.12:10 *“be devoted to one another”*
2. Rom. 12:10 *“give preference to one another”*
3. Rom. 12:16 *“be of the same mind toward one another”*
4. Rom. 13:8 *“love one another”*
5. Rom. 14:19 *“build up one another”*
6. Rom. 15:7 *“accept one another”*
7. Rom. 15:14 *“admonish one another”*
8. Rom. 16:16 *“greet one another”*
9. 1 Cor. 12:25 *“have the same care for one another”*
10. Gal. 5:13 *“serve one another”*
11. Eph. 4:2 *“show tolerance for one another”*
12. Eph. 4:32 *“be kind to one another”*
13. Eph. 5:21 *“be subject to one another”*

14. Phil. 2:3 *“regard one another as more important than yourselves”*
15. Col. 3:13 *“bear with one another”*
16. Col. 3:13 *“forgive one another”*
17. 1 Thess. 4:18 *“comfort one another”*
18. 1 Thess. 5:11 *“encourage one another”*
19. 1 Thess. 5:13 *“live in peace with one another”*
20. 1 Thess. 5:15 *“seek after that which is good for one another”*
21. Heb. 10:24 *“stimulate one another to love and good deeds”*
22. James 5:16 *“confess your sins to one another”*
23. James 5:16 *“pray for one another”*
24. 1 Peter 4:9 *“be hospitable to one another without complaint”*
25. 1 Peter 4:10 *“employ your spiritual gift for one another”*
26. 1 Peter 5:5 *“clothe yourselves with humility toward one another”*

In addition, there are certain “one anothers” that we are commanded NOT to practice:

1. Rom. 14:13 *“do not judge one another”*
2. Gal. 5:26 *“let us not envy one another”*
3. Gal. 5:26 *“let us not challenge one another”*
4. Col. 3:9 *“do not lie to one another”*
5. James 4:11 *“do not speak against one another”*
6. James 5:9 *“do not complain against one another”*

That list gives us 26 positive duties we are to engage in with one another, and 6 negative behaviours we must avoid with one another. We will not be able to obey all of those New Testament commands if you are not committed to a particular local church? You can't, unless you sink your roots in deep and commit yourself to a particular local church over the long haul. If you are bouncing around from congregation to congregation, never committing to the congregation, you'll never be in one place long enough to obey these commands.

Undoubtedly, we will have problems and difficulties and conflicts along the way, but God's will is for us to stay and work them out in love. That's why the Bible tells us we must show tolerance for, forgive, be kind, give preference to, be subject to, and live in peace with one another. If there were no problems or conflicts in a local church, those commands would be meaningless.

Basically, the bottom line is that God wants us to live out our Christian lives with one another as Family. When your brother or sister in your family does something irritating or unkind to you, you don't disown them and you don't move out. You work it out. (For more on resolving conflict, see *Appendix: "Biblical Conflict Resolution"*)

Each particular local church is like a family. God wants us to live life together as a family. Families eat together, work together, and play together. And as God adds more members to this family, we need to be willing to receive them and love them, not separate from them and create cliques.

Every new person who joins Grace is going to come with their own sets of problems. They've all got their own bag of rocks. But so do you! That's why we are commanded to accept one another, love one another and serve one another. You may not like this or that about a person here, but that doesn't matter. We are commanded to love them! Being committed to Grace means you will, with God's help, seek to practice the "one anothers" of the Bible.

2. Submission

Scripture repeatedly commands Christians to submit to their leaders (see Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). The only way to do that is by publicly committing to be members of their flock, and saying in effect, "I commit to listening to your teaching, following your direction, and to submitting to your leadership." There's no way to obey the scriptural commands to submit to your leaders if you never actually submit to them by joining a local church.

Submission to church leaders, in our case, to our elders, isn't an absolute submission. Only God can rightly require that. We owe to all other leaders a qualified submission: we submit to them only insofar as they are acting within the scope of their calling (i.e., church elders cannot enforce the civil law) and what they require is not contrary to Scripture. As the Apostles rightly told the Jewish authorities who had told them not to witness publicly about the resurrected Lord Jesus, *"we must obey God rather than men."* (see Acts 5:29)

All of us will, at times, be called to endure humbly a leader's mistakes and sins.

How do you recognise abusive leadership? Paul requires two witnesses for a charge to be levelled against an elder (see 1 Timothy 5:19), probably because he knows that leaders will be charged with infelicities more often than others, often unfairly.

That said, abusive churches and Christian leaders characteristically:

- Make dogmatic prescriptions in places where Scripture is silent.
- Rely on intelligence, humour, charm, guilt, emotions, or threats rather than on God's Word and prayer (see Acts 6:4).
- Play favourites.
- Punish those who disagree.
- Employ extreme forms of communication (tempers, silent treatment).
- Recommend courses of action which always, somehow, improves the leader's own situation, even at the expense of others.
- Seldom do good deeds in secret.
- Seldom encourage.
- Seldom give the benefit of the doubt.
- Emphasise outward conformity, rather than repentance of heart.
- Preach, counsel, disciple, and oversee the church with lips that fail to ground everything in what Christ has done in the gospel and to give glory to God.

Following the steps of Scriptural discipline in Matthew 18, you should speak directly to the leader(s) who may be behaving this way in order to help them see that their ways of behaving aren't Scriptural and helping the congregation.

If they will not listen to you, try again, taking someone else to witness their response. If they still do not respond positively, then you may appeal to the broader church. Grace is part of the Queensland Presbytery of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Queensland Presbytery is made up (at present) of Grace and three other WPC congregations in the state. They can act to investigate claims of wrongdoing and to address outcomes for positive change. Every member of Grace has that right of appeal to the broader church in our presbytery, and if necessary, to appeal to the broadest representation of the WPC, the National Assembly.

For more on resolving conflict, see Appendix: "Biblical Conflict Resolution"

Submission in the local church is not just to its leaders, but to one another in the congregation. We are commanded in Philippians 2:3, *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."* We, in love, should strive to understand one another in the Lord, bear one another's burdens (see Galatians 6:1) and commit to serving one another in love.

Members promise to faithfully participate in the stated worship services of the church unless providentially hindered. This is also a promise to use your gifts, talents and finances for the work of the church to the best of your ability. While members are not going to be able to participate in everything, this vow does imply that you will actively participate in the life of the church through things like: care groups, men's or women's meetings, fellowship activities, etc. We also, as part of our church vows pledge ourselves to assist parents in the Christian nurture of their children. This would include serving in the creche, teaching Sunday school, etc. An important part of our submission to one another in love is to be praying for the church, officers, members and with fellow believers in the church. Witnessing to the faith and your faith; inviting people to attend church with you. Making a point to warmly welcome visitors and church, and also into your life as the Lord gives you opportunity.

3. Service/Ministry

The Bible is clear:

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”

(1 Peter 4:10 ESV)

Those who belong to the church of Jesus Christ are expected to use the gifts they have been given to serve and build up the rest of the body. Being part of the community of Jesus body means serving in one or more ministries within the church.

There are many ministry opportunities at Grace where you can serve your brothers and sisters in Christ. Talk to a pastor or elder about getting involved. If you are not sure where your gifts lie, also speak to a pastor or elder so we can help you discover the gift or gifts Christ has given you.



Examples of ministries at Grace:

- Serving tea after worship services
- Teaching and helping at Sunday School. Grace ALIVE (youth ministry)
- Helping at Wednesday playgroup
- Preparing the Lord’s Supper for services (once a month)
- Serving in the music ministry team to lead sung worship at services
- Mowing lawns
- Greeting at the door
- Church cleaning
- Casserole ministry (supplying meals for those in need)

4. Worship

Christian worship is so much more than singing songs. Romans 12:1-2 teaches that our entire lives should be living sacrifices of worship to God through Jesus Christ.

However, much of the life of our church is expressed at our weekly Sunday worship services, which take place at 7.45am and 9.30am. This is where we gather to worship Jesus together by praying, singing, giving, and responding in obedience to God's Word as it read and taught.

The 'shape' of our worship services aims to reflect the gospel message. We begin with a respectful approach in praise and adoration to our holy and majestic God. A reflection on God's holiness sheds light on our own unworthiness before him, because of our sin. We then come to God in the name of Jesus Christ to seek forgiveness and grace for our sins.

“Only when there is a profound awareness of the holiness of God and of the costliness of the sacrifice he provided will there be a joyful awe that is at once warm and forceful.”

- Timothy J. Keller, Worship By The Book: Reformed Worship in the Global City

This confession being a reflection of our conversion, we then worship God with the gifts he has given us in the collection, and come before our heavenly Father in thanks and to ask for his blessings of provision and compassion on us and our world.

We then move to the reading and teaching of God's Word, after which we go out into the world renewed and strengthened, and with God's blessing, to be lights in the darkness.



Our worship services contain a lot of Bible readings! You will hear us open the service with a “call to worship”. We'll read a passage calling us to confess our sins or trust in God's grace for forgiveness, and after praying read a passage confirming the promised forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ.

We'll read passages reminding how we ought to approach giving, praying or reading the Bible. We'll teach from a passage of the Bible. Finally, the service leader will pronounce a blessing on the congregation from the Bible before we depart. Occasionally, the leader may introduce songs with readings from the Bible.

This is all because we place a high value on God speaking to us and revealing himself from his Word. Our worship is a response to what he has revealed.

Members are expected to faithfully attend and participate in worship services at Grace. This means that our normal plan for the week is to go to church on Sunday, not just if there's nothing better to do!

Hebrews 10:25 tells us

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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 ESV)

5. Grace Community Groups

We believe that the Christian life is meant to be lived in community with other people. In a growing church, it's hard to maintain the kind of community where deep personal relationships are built, where real encouragement and care happens, where we walk the Christian life together, where we read and study the Bible together, and where we pray for each other, for our church and our world in meaningful ways.

The Bible says about the first generation of Christians:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.”

(Acts 2:42–44 ESV)

This is why we have a network of Grace Community Groups. There are groups meeting all over the Sunshine Coast, at different times during the week.

During the regular school term, our Grace Community Groups work through Bible studies prepared by our pastors, which follow on from the Bible teaching during our Sunday worship services each week. This gives you the opportunity to discuss the Bible among friends, ask questions, and talk seriously about lining up our lives with God's Word.

Grace Community Groups are also a great place to meet other Christians in your area, to grow and to pray together. Some groups are open to anyone, some are either ladies-only or men-only, others are focussed on a particular age or stage of life. Some groups happen during the day, others in the evening. We are aiming to plant as many groups as we can across the Sunshine Coast.

Please note, groups only meet regularly during the school term. Please contact speak to us for more information about attending a group. Visitors and guests are always welcome!

6. Prayer

Prayer is essential to the healthy life of the church. We're told the early church "devoted" themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14, 2:42).

Prayer is an incredible blessing, whereby we may talk to the God of the universe as our Father, expressing our admiration and love, finding forgiveness of sin, seeking what we need for life and godliness, and pleading his cause on earth.

At Grace, we devote a significant part of our worship services to prayer (adoring God, confessing our sin to him, thanking him for his blessings, asking for his grace upon our church and our world, and praying that he might open his Word to us and give us the grace to obey it).



We also have two open prayer meetings during the week: one at 12.00pm on Tuesdays, and one at 5.00pm on Sundays (just before Grow @ Grace).

Prayer is also a significant activity in our Grace Community Groups.

7. Giving

In the Old Testament, the Israelite tithe was channelled by God to those who needed it — to the priests and Levites who had no other source of income because of their duties, and to the poor of the land. We see a similar pattern in the New Testament, where Christian giving is directed to meeting the needs of those who labour amongst us in the Lord in other words the Pastors, as well as towards those in need, and especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (see 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Galatians 6:6, 1 Corinthians 9:7-14)

The ministry at the Grace receives almost all of its support from the giving of Grace members, and a large proportion of your giving should go towards supporting this ministry. We'll leave you to work out the details of what a 'large proportion' might mean in practice.

Grace also works closely with other ministries. We currently support several domestic and foreign missionaries, serving locally and elsewhere in Queensland, Vanuatu, Japan, and the Solomon Islands.

We want to encourage as many members as possible to give electronically. This is by far the best for church as it means; less money to count each week, less security risk, more regular giving, easier budgeting.

1. *Direct transfer — through the Internet or a Bank Periodical Payments*

This is the easiest and the most cost effective for you the giver and the church. All you need to do is set up a regular transfer from your account to the church's. This can be done over the counter at the bank or via the Internet (just ask your bank). You can schedule your payments and change them at any time.

Bank Account Details:

Name: Grace Christian Church Buderim

Bank: Suncorp

Acc: 05-8499251

BSB: 484-799

2. *Offering during worship services*

We take-up an offering during our morning worship services as part of our worship. If you wish not to utilise giving electronically, or if you want to give in addition to your regular electronic giving, you may give at this time. This is also a good teaching moment for our children to show them that giving to God's Work is a natural response to God blessing us in our Christian lives.

8. Mission

The Bible teaches that the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to go out to the ends of the earth (see Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8), in order that the God's chosen people from every nation, culture and language may be restored to him.

As an extension of our commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in the local community where God has placed us, we partner with missionaries who are proclaiming Jesus in other parts of Australia and other parts of the world.

We pray for them and contribute to their material needs. Our GO (Grace Outreach) Team maintains correspondence with them and presents a slot in our services on the final Sunday of each month to update the church on their activities and to pray for them.



Questions for Reflection:

- Why do you think many professing Christians have a hard time seeing the vital role that a local church plays in demonstrating the reality of their faith in Christ?
- How might a professing Christian who is not a member of a local church justify themselves concerning the use of their spiritual gifts? How would you respond?
- Do you have any final questions about anything covered in this course?

Notes

Appendix

1. Biblical Conflict Resolution

This appendix is copied from the Book of Church Order for the Presbyterian Church In America (2013).

PREFACE

As we continue to seek to become a church holy before God, the manner in which we respond to sin and conflicts in the body, and gently shepherd those caught in sin, will reflect our commitment to the authority of God's Word and the spirit of love, which should define all of our actions and relationships. Biblical peacemaking is one of God's highest priorities (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18; Gal. 6:1); therefore, it must be one of our highest priorities. The Book of Church Order (BCO) reflects our commitment to following God's procedure for reclaiming those going astray. It says, "Scriptural law is the basis of all discipline because it is the revelation of God's Holy will. Proper disciplinary principles are set forth in the Scriptures and must be followed" (BCO 27-5). It also says, "An injured party shall not become a prosecutor of personal offences without having tried the means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender, required by Christ" (BCO 31-5). The purpose of this Appendix is to provide guidance through the steps of biblical peacemaking required as pre-conditions to judicial process in cases of personal offence (BCO 31-5), and for use whenever possible in cases of general offence (BCO 31-7).

Each presbytery should endeavour to have several elders trained in the methods of "Christian conciliation" (including mediation and arbitration), and available to serve as Christian conciliators in cases that could and should be resolved privately before judicial process is initiated. We would do well to follow the wisdom of those who have considered the importance of this matter. For example, Elder Edmund Clowney states, "Discipline...is not first an exercise of negative judgment, a matter of church courts and censures. It begins with the care of friends with whom we strive to follow Christ" (Clowney, E.P., *The Church*, IVP, 1995).

THE BIBLICAL STEPS OF DISCIPLINE AS THEY RELATE TO BIBLICAL PEACEMAKING

BCO 27-5 outlines the proper principles for the exercise of church discipline. This BCO section emphasises that the steps indicated, (a) through (d), must be followed in proper order. The steps are:

- a) Instruction in the Word;
- b) An individual's responsibility to admonish one another (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1);
- c) If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matt. 18:16);
- d) If rejection persists, then the church must act through her court unto admonition, suspension, excommunication and deposition.

This Appendix addresses the first three steps, (a) through (c), by providing an expanded discussion of the implications raised by Scriptural direction for a complete process at each step. Step (d), formal church discipline, is addressed by Part II of the Book of Church Order, The Rules of Discipline.

1. The first step - Instruction in the Word.

Many Christians do not fully understand the emphasis God places on living at peace and in unity with others (Eph. 4: 3). Preaching and teaching should regularly address this emphasis and the purposes for church discipline as set forth in BCO 27-3 and BCO 27-4. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the main procedural passage related to church discipline, Matthew 18:15-20, is set forth in the context of two powerful parables teaching the extent and depth of God's love in reclaiming those who have strayed (Matt. 18:10-14), and the vast measure of His forgiveness and the expansive forgiveness He expects from His children toward one another (Matt. 18:21-35). The extent of instruction on reconciliation provided to church members in "new member classes" and regular preaching from the pulpit will have a significant bearing on the extent to which a church member understands the benefits of church discipline and has consented to ecclesiastical jurisdiction (which is helpful for the church if it is to avoid legal liability for the proper exercise of church discipline).

Teaching God's Word concerning sin, and conflicts that result from it, and how Christians should respond biblically to conflict, will equip church members to become peacemakers themselves. Peacemaking has always been one of a Christian's most important ministries. As we are reminded in 2 Corinthians 5:18, God "reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." One of the most powerful ways that we can encourage reconciliation with God is to model reconciliation among people. When others see us resolve our differences in a loving and biblical manner, they are inclined to give more weight to what we say about the Lord (John 13:34-35; 17:20-23). On the other hand, when

they see Christians embroiled in disputes, they tend to write God's people off as hypocrites and dismiss the claims of Christ (Rom. 2:21-24; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).

The Bible sets forth a process for resolving personal and substantive disputes in a constructive manner. This process is sometimes referred to as "Christian conciliation" and it may be used to resolve everything from minor personal differences to church divisions or lawsuits involving church members. As indicated in passages such as Proverbs 19:11, Matthew 5:23-25 and 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, and Galatians 6:1, conciliation involves three basic steps: (1) when Christians are involved in a conflict that is too serious to overlook, the first thing that they should do is meet together privately and in person to try to resolve their differences; (2) if this effort is unsuccessful, they should ask one or more other Christians to meet with them and help them to seek reconciliation and a voluntary settlement of their differences (a process sometimes referred to as mediation); and (3) if they cannot arrive at a voluntary settlement, they should ask one or more other Christians to hear both sides of the matter and render a biblically based decision that both sides are obligated to accept (a process sometimes referred to as arbitration).

There are many benefits to resolving disputes through Christian conciliation. It prevents a public quarrel that would dishonour the Lord Jesus Christ and diminish the credibility and witness of His Church. Conciliation also allows Christians to demonstrate their faith in Christ and their confidence in His teachings (John 13:34;



14:15; 17:20-23). In addition, conciliation encourages forgiveness and promotes reconciliation, which can help to preserve valuable relationships and strengthen the Church (Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-17). Conciliation also helps people to identify and deal with the root causes of conflict, which may include such things as pride, selfishness, fear, vengeance, greed, bitterness, or unforgiveness (see Matt. 7:3-5). This allows people to make changes in their lives so that they will enjoy more peaceful relationships in the future (Eph. 4:1-3, 22-24).

Christian conciliation is especially beneficial for people who sincerely want to do what is right and are open to learning where they have been wrong (Prov. 15:31-32). Conciliators can help them to identify improper attitudes or unwise practices, to understand more fully the effects of their decision and actions, and to make

improvements in their lives that will help them to honour and serve the Lord more effectively in the future (1 Peter 2:12).

Teaching and Ruling elders are encouraged to learn all they can about Christian conciliation and develop local ministries that will equip members under their care to respond to conflicts in a manner that reflects the power of Christ working in their lives. The more church members understand these concepts and benefits, the more likely they will be to apply biblical principles when conflicts occur.

2. The second step - An individual's responsibility to admonish another (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1).

Scripture warns against making a premature judgment about a matter (Matt. 7:1-5). By first going personally and in private to those who have offended, we provide the opportunity for clarification of misunderstandings and avoid premature judgment. This step includes the three responses of personal peacemaking as follows:

Overlook an offence: An individual may overlook an offence of another if it is minor in nature and it has not significantly dishonoured God, damaged a personal relationship, or hurt other people (including the offender). "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offence" (Prov. 19:11).

Discussion: When personal wrongs are too serious to overlook, the parties are required to seek to resolve them privately through loving confrontation and confession. "If your brother has something against you...go and be reconciled" (Matt. 5:23-24). "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you" (Matt. 18:15).

Negotiation: When a substantive issue related to money, property, or other material issues or rights divides Christians, a process of biblical negotiation should be followed that will meet the interests of all those involved. "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

Privately responding to conflict early, before it escalates, through the means of these three forms of personal peacemaking will often result in reconciliation and no need for further peacemaking attention. Successful personal peacemaking is usually based on at least one parties' willingness to accept responsibility for how they have contributed to the conflict and by being willing to humble themselves for

the greater goal of God's glory through "making every effort" (Eph. 4:3) to keep the unity of the spirit.

3. The third step - If private admonition is rejected, then calling of one or more witnesses (Matt. 18:16; 1 Cor. 6:1-9).

Involving others is a serious escalation of a conflict and should be considered only after the elements of step two have been fully exhausted. Step three includes the three assisted peacemaking responses as follows:

Mediation: If a dispute cannot be resolved through personal peacemaking, the parties should ask one or more other Christians to meet with them to help the parties communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions. The mediators may give advice but have no power to impose solutions. They may later act as witnesses in formal church disciplinary proceedings, should mediation fail due to hardness of heart or the unrepentant sin of one or both parties. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Matt. 18:16).

Arbitration: When two parties to a conflict cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a substantive issue, one or more arbitrators may be appointed to listen to the arguments and evidence of each side and render a binding decision. "If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church" (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

Church Discipline: Formal church discipline, pursuant to the procedures of BCO Part II, is reserved for those cases where the person who professes to be a Christian refuses to be reconciled, repent of personal sin, and do what is right. Church leaders bearing ecclesiastical jurisdiction over such persons should formally intervene to promote justice, repentance, and forgiveness. "If he refuses to listen, tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17-20).

APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES

Judicial cases that come to the attention of church courts frequently begin as personal disputes between two or more individuals. Typically, when one side feels they are not getting what they want, they bring charges of sin against the other side. In this manner, sessions and presbyteries are drawn into conflicts that would better be resolved at a personal level through Christian conciliation. Of course, when



conflicted parties refuse to be reconciled, the accountability afforded by formal church discipline should be used to further the goals of purity in the Church, the rebuke of offences, the removal of scandal, and the spiritual good of offenders (1 Cor. 5:5). Every effort should be made, however, to resolve the conflict through repentance, confession,

forgiveness and reconciliation before formal charges are entertained by a church court. The intent of the relevant BCO provisions is to encourage Christian unity before the formal provisions of church discipline are brought to bear on a situation. Of course, not every situation will lend itself to Christian conciliation. However, every effort should be made to utilise private confrontation, mediation, and arbitration in order to reserve the use of formal church discipline, and the time of church courts, for those matters related to the purity of the Church and the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners (BCO 27-3). Many of these ends will be realised through the processes of Christian conciliation and, therefore, should be viewed as prerequisite procedures to the formal disciplinary process.

FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE STEPS

Churches unwilling or unable to instruct their members completely in the full breadth of the steps of conciliation and discipline encourage resorting to unbiblical, worldly responses to conflict. The escape responses of denial, flight, and even suicide can be expected if church members are not positively directed to the biblical processes of Christian conciliation. Others, when not given the hope of having matters responded to within the body of Christ, will resort to civil litigation, verbal and physical attack, and possibly even murder to remove an opponent where there is no avenue for a just resolution.

Moving a case too quickly to formal church discipline can build barriers that could otherwise be dealt with in mediation or arbitration. Every church and presbytery is encouraged to equip elders and mature members with the skills of Christian conciliation, and to exhaust conciliation processes and remedies before moving to formal church discipline.”

- taken from “THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA Sixth Edition (2013 Reprint)”

2. How To Leave A Church

Sometimes the best way forward in the face of conflict or dissatisfaction is to leave a church. This is not a decision to be made rashly or lightly. (The advice below is from Mark Dever's book *Nine Marks Of A Healthy Church*, p.57.)

BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO LEAVE

1. Pray.
2. Let your current pastor know about your thinking before you move to another church or make your decision to relocate to another city. Ask for his counsel.
3. Weigh your motives. Is your desire to leave because of sinful, personal conflict or disappointment? If it's because of doctrinal reasons, are these doctrinal issues significant?
4. Do everything within your power to reconcile any broken relationships.
5. Be sure to consider all the "evidences of grace" you've seen in the church's life— places where God's work is evident. If you cannot see any evidences of God's grace, you might want to examine your own heart once more (Matthew 7:3-5).
6. Be humble. Recognise you don't have all the facts and assess people and circumstances charitably (give them the benefit of the doubt).

IF YOU GO . . .

1. Don't divide the body.
2. Take the utmost care not to sow discontent even among your closest friends. Remember, you don't want anything to hinder their growth in grace in this church. Deny any desire to gossip (sometimes referred to as "venting" or "saying how you feel").
3. Pray for and bless the congregation and its leadership. Look for ways of doing this practically. If there has been hurt, then forgive — even as you have been forgiven.

3. Recommended Books

- *Know and Tell The Gospel*, by John Chapman
- *What Is The Gospel?*, by Greg Gilbert
- *Salvation Belongs To The Lord*, by John Frame
- *The Compelling Community*, by Jamie Dunlop and Mark Dever
- *Worship By The Book*, ed. Don Carson
- *One To One Bible Reading*, by David Helm
- *The Peace-Maker*, by Ken Sande
- *How To Be A Healthy Church Member*, by Thabiti Anywabile
- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God*, by Timothy Keller
- *Taking God At His Word*, by Kevin DeYoung
- *For Calvinism*, by Michael Horton
- *Confessing The Faith: A Reader's Guide To The Westminster Confession of Faith*, by Chad Van Dixhoorn



4. Other resources

- **Grace Christian Church Buderim**

- www.gracechurchbuderim.com.au
- www.facebook.com/GraceChurchBuderim

- **Grace Christian Church Buderim Constitution**

- www.gracechurchbuderim.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Constitution-of-Grace-Buderim.pdf

- **Westminster Presbyterian Church**

- www.wpc.org.au (*here you can find details of other WPC churches around Australia*)

- **Westminster Confession of Faith**

- www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/