

playing your part | *Membership at Grace*

We believe that church membership is a biblical implication for the life of a believer ¹. We also believe that every member has a unique and invaluable role to play in the life and ministry of this church. For Grace Church, then, the following reflects our requirements for membership, as well as our encouragements to all members:

requirements to be a member

1. A credible profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 10.9, 1 Cor 12.13, etc.)
2. Be in substantial agreement with the essential tenets of our “*Confessional Statement*” (Eph 4.4-6), and able to be supportive of (i.e., not divisive over differences with) our “*Theological Distinctives*” (Eph 4.1-3) ²
3. Be baptized, if not already baptized, as expression of faith in Jesus (or commit to being baptized at next available opportunity) (Matt 28.19, Acts 2.38, Rom 6.1-4, etc.).
 - NOTE: for those who have been baptized as infants and would have a conviction of conscience against being baptized *again* as a believer, we do not wish to ask them to violate their conscience in this regard.
4. Gather visibly and tangibly with this body by regularly attending the Sunday service (Acts 20.7, 1 Cor 16.2, Heb 10.25)
5. Be willing to receive spiritual care from the elders, and be able to affirm the overall leadership of the elders (Heb 13.17)
6. Complete the *Discovering Grace Church* class (listening online to review any lessons missed), have an interview with an elder to discuss membership, and sign the “Membership Agreement” (which includes concurring with our *Statement on Church Discipline* and our *Statement on Divorce and Remarriage* – **see addendum I and II to this lesson**).
 - NOTE: for those coming from another church, we may ask for permission to inquire with their previous church about how and why they left that church.

encouragements to all members

In addition to those requirements for membership, we encourage further expressions of biblical Christianity as one participates in the life and ministry of this church. These would include:

1. Pray for the church and it’s ministry (Matt 6.7-13, Eph 6.18-20, Col. 4.2-4, etc.)
2. Continue to attend Sunday services and members’ meetings on a regular basis (Acts 20.7, 1 Cor 16.2, Heb 10.25)
3. Find places of regular service in and through the church (Eph 4.12-13, 1 Cor 12, 1 Pet 4.10-11, etc.)
4. Pursue expressions of community one of our home groups, for reasons of care, relationship, and spiritual growth (Heb 3.12-13, Heb 10.24-25, etc.)
5. Give financially, as one is able, to the ministry of the gospel through this church (2 Cor 8.1-9, 2 Cor 9.9-15, Gal 6.6, etc.)
6. Seek to reach out to one’s own network of relationships with the good news of Jesus (Matt 28.18-20, Acts 1.8, Acts 8.4, 1 Thes 1.8, 1 Pet 3.15-17)

¹ See the message and outline entitled “Discovering Grace Church – Part 1” for reasons why we believe membership is a biblical implication for believers in Jesus. They can found at www.gracechurcheast.org

² Our “Confessional Statement” and “Theological Distinctives” can be found on the membership page our website.

playing your part | *Living Out Gospel Identities*

Every member has a unique and invaluable role to play as they live out their **“gospel identities”** – i.e., who they are now in Jesus. It’s putting the “who” before the “do”, and seeing any “do” in the Christian life flowing first out of “who” we are in Christ.

in Jesus you are: *a child of God*

Through his death and resurrection of Jesus, every believer in Jesus is a **CHILD OF GOD**. We are adopted us into God’s family - freely forgiven, fully accepted, and deeply loved. That identity we have in Jesus has wonderful implications for our lives individually, but also corporately.

This identity means that we’ve been brought into God’s family - the church: *“...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in **the household of God, which is the church of the living God...**”* (1 Timothy 3:15) In other words, our identity as a child of God applies to us not just as individuals; it also has a *corporate* dimension. God is saving a *people*, not an unconnected group of isolated individuals. Practically speaking, this means:

- As children of God, we welcome others as God welcomed us

Being God’s beloved children means we have the joy and responsibility of receiving others into our church family in the same way God has received us: **“...welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you...”** (Rom 15.7)

Thus, regardless of our differences in culture, race, background, political preference, educational means, or economic situation, we want to gladly welcome others for Jesus’ sake that we might be an earthly glimpse of the fact that Jesus *“ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...”* (Rev 5.9)

- As children of God, we reconcile with others when there is an offense

Our identity as adopted and beloved children in God’s family means we are called and compelled to actively pursue unity, as well as be reconciled whenever there is an offense between us. God commands that we *“live in harmony with one another.”* And so it is incumbent on all of us that, **“...so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”** (Romans 12.16, 18)

It is by our love for each other that we provide a lost and fragmented society a compelling picture of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ: *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35).

- As children of God, we pursue relationships together and spiritual fellowship

God’s intention is that “church” be a body of people joined together, not just a series of meetings. In other words, we are to be a relational community marked by the reality the New Testament calls *fellowship*. We get a glimpse of this reality in the earliest gatherings of the church:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ...And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:42, 45-47).

in Jesus you are: *a minister*

This good news of Jesus also places on our lives the identity of a **MINISTER** (or servant). God wants to use us as members of a body called to minister, since Jesus came to “*purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*” (Titus 2.14). In fact, the way in which we live out this identity is closely tied to our Lord’s own example and sacrifice.

- As ministers, we follow Jesus’ example

Although Jesus is worthy of the worship and service of all creation, his life was a model of servanthood for us who follow him: “*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them*” (John 13:14-17).

- As ministers, we are motivated by Jesus’ sacrifice

Our service to others is rooted in how we ourselves have been served by God. Thus the good news about Jesus compels us to follow the one who “came not to be served by to serve”: “*...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:43-45).

Our privilege, then, is to follow our Savior by ministering to people in our church community and in our city. Thus, we desire to see every member using his or her gifts to glorify God and serve others. Such service happens in this body as we:

- Look for spontaneous ministry opportunities

We all have numerous opportunities to glorify God as we serve others – providing meals when someone is sick, providing childcare when someone has an urgent need, providing hospitality when someone is new to the church, etc. Such spontaneous occasions are an important and essential part of our ministry to each other as a body: “*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*” (Galatians 6:10)

- Join a structured ministry of the church

Joining a structured ministry of the church involves serving in various aspects of church life on a ministry teams or in children’s ministry. These ministries provide concrete service opportunities and meet specific needs for the ministry of this local church and the building up of this body.

Although we ask you to become a member of this church prior to serving on a ministry team or in the Children’s Ministry, we would encourage you to begin considering how God may want to use you:

- Read through the ministry team list (found on our website)
- Prayerfully consider where you have gifts for service
- Prayerfully consider where there are current needs

Because of our identity as ministers of Jesus, there are to be no passive participants in the church. Instead, we want every member actively serving somewhere – empowered by God’s Spirit and making a difference for God’s glory! “*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

in Jesus you are: a steward

In Jesus, God calls each of us his **STEWARD** – people who are managing his resources on his behalf. Our stewardship is rooted in a fundamental reality: God owns everything! All that we have comes from Him; we are merely stewards—overseers or managers—of things that belong to God. *One way* we live out this identity is through the use of our finances; for our purposes here that will be our focus.

- As stewards, our spiritual lives are reflected in our stewardship

The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God, it is also an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health. Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, anxiety over money—all of these reveal that our trust and security are found more in money than in God. In the same way, generosity and faithfulness reveal that our trust and security are ultimately found in God.

*“If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ...No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and money**” (Luke 16:11, 13).*

- As stewards, our privilege is to support the work of God through the church

Throughout salvation history, God has used His people to support His work financially. For instance, the giving of a tithe (a tenth part) predated the Law of Moses (Gen. 14:20; 28:22) but was later formalized in the Law for maintaining the temple and providing for those serving there (Lev 27:30-32).

In the New Testament, giving to support the work of God through the church remains an expectation and our privilege. While commands for particular percentages of giving are not found in the New Testament, the grace of God in Jesus means to intensify (not reduce) the biblical impulse for generous giving:

*“...as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—**see that you excel in this act of grace also... For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.**” (2 Corinthians 8:7, 9)*

Such financial giving to the work of God through the church serves to do many things – including:

- Supporting the needs of individuals (*Acts 4:34-35; 1 Timothy 5.3, 9-16*)
- Supporting the church’s leaders so they can devote themselves to serving the church (*1 Corinthians 9:13-14, Galatians 6:6*).
- Supporting the extension of the gospel (*Philippians 4:15-16*)

- As stewards, our hearts provide the key to our stewardship

Scripture also addresses our motives and attitudes as stewards: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, **for God loves a cheerful giver**” (2 Corinthians 9:7).* Here’s a brief summary of how God addresses our *hearts* as stewards:

- A heart that trusts God for grace to be generous (*2 Corinthians 9:6, 8*).
- A heart that is cheerful to give, not reluctant (*2 Corinthians 9:7*)
- A heart that seeks God’s praise, not that of others (*Matthew 6:1-4*)
- A heart that prizes heaven more than earth (*Matthew 6:19-21*)

Most importantly, the way in which we live out our identity as stewards must be rooted in the gospel of Jesus. It’s the grace we enjoy in Jesus that compels us to live out our lives for his glory and fame: ***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*** (2 Corinthians 8:9)

in Jesus you are: *a missionary*

The grace of God also places on our lives the identity of **MISSIONARY** as people who are, in effect, “sent” by Jesus. Jesus said to his first disciples: “*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” (John 20:21) In an analogous way, he sends us today to proclaim his good news to every “*end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8), including this “end of the earth” in which we are located right now.

- As missionaries, we join God in his mission

From their inception, God’s people have had at the core of their identity an element of mission. When God revealed himself to Abraham, He promised not only to bless Abraham but also to make him and his descendants a blessing to all nations of the earth (*Genesis 22:17-18*). After his atoning work on the cross, Jesus gave his followers a mandate to proclaim the good news of what he had done to all the nations. It is through the proclamation of this gospel that God will gather all his people to himself, and thus fulfill his original promise to bless “*all the nations.*”

*“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

- As missionaries, we represent God and his heart to our community

Jesus models for us the heart of God and God’s loving pursuit of the lost through Christ. We want to share and represent the very same heart of love toward those around us. In essence, we want to rejoice over what heaven rejoices over!

*“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So he told them this parable: ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be **more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**” (Luke 15:1-7)*

- As missionaries, we bear witness to Jesus and his saving work

Since every Christian has personally experienced the grace of God through the gospel, each of us has a part to play in testifying to the salvation God offers through the gospel. The work of evangelism is essentially that of *bearing witness* — testifying to what God has done for us through the gospel.

*“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? **And how are they to hear without someone preaching?**” (Romans 10:14-15 - see also 1 Peter 3:15)*

We said earlier that we “**scatter for mission**” every week by *praying* for, *relating* to, and *sharing* this good news to those around us. In this way, we encourage everyone at Grace Church to think and live as missionaries to their own networks of relationship. These “fields of harvest” (see Matt. 9:38) include our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and classmates.

As a church, we also provide contexts to which you can invite those you’re reaching out to (e.g., special “guest” Sundays, outreach events, and tools to help us share the gospel personally (*Simply Jesus* bible studies, gospel tracts, etc.). We want to see every member joining Jesus in his mission – motivated by God’s love, and sharing the message of God’s grace in Christ.

addendum 1 | *Statement on Church Discipline*

Throughout its pages, the Bible sounds a recurring theme: those God loves, he disciplines.¹ That is, he teaches and trains us for our good as he transforms us from within. This is the nature of all biblical, redemptive “discipline”.

Such teaching and training, in the form of God’s discipline, is a sometimes challenging process as God corrects his people’s thoughts, words and behavior so they can fulfill their calling of becoming more and more like him. God disciplines his people through a variety of means. He calls his people first to self-discipline. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as he reads the Bible and hears the Bible taught and applied.² As he compares his life to God’s Word, he adjusts himself to conform to his Savior by the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, individual interaction with God and his Word is not the only means that God uses to make his children holy; God also intends to use his people. “Brothers,” writes Paul, “if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness....”³ As members of this local church, we wish to take seriously our responsibility to “restore” members who fail to respond to God’s personal discipline. This means that beginning with private confrontation and, if necessary, leading to public rebuke, we seek to help one another overcome any refusal to repent of those words and actions that the Bible clearly defines as sin.⁴ This would apply to areas of sin that could bring harm to oneself or others, as well as reproach to the Lord. It could also include a refusal to turn from heretical doctrine.

Jesus outlined a process for redemptively addressing another believer’s sin in Matthew 18:15-17.⁵ As a church, we agree that this is the appropriate way to approach someone who refuses to appropriate God’s grace for change. Initially, such a process should be informal: if a Christian sees a brother or sister sinning in a way that appears to be continual or habitual, he should approach that person personally and inquire about it. If in fact there is unrepentant sin and a refusal to repent, then the concerned brother or sister should involve one or two others, which may include an elder. If this larger group confirms that sin continues without repentance, the process may move to more formal church discipline as the circle of those involved is appropriately expanded. The goal in doing so is always that we might have “gained (our) brother (or sister)” (Matthew 18:15).

When the church begins to formally discipline a member, the church’s elders inquire with the individual member in question to confirm fact and to appeal for change. If change is not forthcoming in an appropriate time frame, the elders will inform the church of the member and his sin, urging members to contact the erring member and appeal for repentance. During this time, the member under discipline may not participate in the Lord’s Supper. In addition, his participation with members should revolve around his need for change. If, after a reasonable period of appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the elders will inform the church again, this time announcing that they must revoke membership and that the church must now treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers: in other words, when they interact with this person they should not have “fellowship” as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put his or her faith in the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for their sins.

It should be noted that Church discipline has nothing to do with “shunning” a person. It involves confronting sin in love and with gentleness. Where more formal discipline is needed, this does not comprise the rejection of a relationship but a change in the nature of that relationship. If a person under discipline is not disruptive or a harmful influence, he is welcomed to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers. The elders may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the member proves to be disruptive or is leading others into sin or error. In these cases, the elders may ask church members to avoid all contact with an individual in order to mitigate his or her sinful influence.

At times a member may seek to withdraw from the church to avoid church discipline and its consequences. Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock (Matthew 18:12-14; Ezekiel 34:4,8,16), so shall the elders and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord. Therefore, discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the elders determine that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord. While the church cannot force a withdrawing member to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person's membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged.

If a member leaves the church while he is under the scrutiny of the disciplinary process or while a censure against him is still in effect, and if the elders learn that he is attending another church, they may inform that church's leadership that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of his sin, and, at the same time, serve to warn the other church to be on guard against possible harm that the accused might do (see Matthew 18:12-14; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3 John 9-10).

Once the elders make a sin publicly known, they also commit to inform the church of repentance and restoration to fellowship as appropriate to the situation and the good of the church. Again, this is our earnest desire and motive for any disciplinary process. We believe the grace of God in Jesus is more than sufficient to restore any person who truly repents of his or her sin.

Christians who attend our church and have been excluded from fellowship from another church will not be allowed to participate in fellowship here unless they repent of their sins and make confession and restitution with their former church or the elders of this church are able to determine that the former church did not apply church discipline according to Scripture.

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1. *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives"* (Hebrews 12:5-6 ESV, see also verses 7-13).
 2. See John 15:3, 10, 20; John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:11-13.
 3. Galatians 6:1 ESV
 4. Other New Testament passages (besides Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-17) that support this practice include: 1 Corinthians 5; Acts: 20:28ff; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.
 5. *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (ESV).*

addendum 2 | *Statement on Divorce and Remarriage*

Divorce is a sad and often painful reality in our society and in the church at large. While God has, from the beginning, intended that marriage be lifelong¹ and glorify God by reflecting the relationship of Christ to his church,² there are times when our Lord permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. The conditions under which this may happen are only two:

- when a spouse commits sins that involve sexual contact with another person;³
- when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage.⁴

It is important to note that God permits divorce in such cases. Divorce is not required, nor will the church encourage a spouse to divorce when he or she has faith toward God for the marriage to be restored—even when the situations listed above exist.

For the church to condone a divorce in these cases, the spouse must submit the facts of his or her marital situation to the elders to determine before God in Scripture what he would permit. If a spouse who is a member of the church seeks a divorce from another member due to abandonment, he or she must first wait for the church to follow its practice of church discipline to the end of treating the sinning spouse as an unbeliever before divorce may become a biblically allowable option.

Separated spouses awaiting a pending divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court declares the divorce final and legally recognized. They should thus conduct themselves in the church as a married person.

If a divorced person becomes a member of the church, he or she should understand that remarriage will only be condoned by the church when the circumstances prior to the divorce, or following after the divorce, fall under the two conditions listed above. If the circumstances of the divorce do not conform to what Scripture deems acceptable, the divorced person should consider before God whether he or she should seek reconciliation with his or her former spouse. He or she should also seek to confess to God and to his or her former spouse any sins committed in the seeking of a divorce that did not comply with the teaching of Scripture.

However, the situations in which people find themselves vary greatly, especially as it relates to divorce and remarriage. If you have questions about how the Bible speaks to your situation, please speak with an elder. We would be happy to discuss your situation and hope with you in the grace of God that can redeem any situation, no matter how painful or challenging.

Lastly, in applying the Bible to situations related to divorce it should also be noted that there are situations in which a spouse finds himself or herself in some physical danger as they relate to their spouse. We would urge an appropriate physical separation for the protection of a spouse in such a situation, and we would encourage the involvement of the civil authorities whenever or wherever appropriate for that situation. The goal of such a separation should be protection, with the ultimate goal of reconciliation at an appropriate time. However, such a separation for one's physical protection is not in violation of the biblical principles described above.

1. Matthew 19:4-5; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

2. Ephesians 5:22-33

3. Matthew 5:31-32

4. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16