

Lesson 2

Means of Grace

“Means of grace” are spiritual disciplines or acts of devotion through which God channels His blessing. They are acts that will help us grow in our relationship with God and experience more of His favor. Just as a healthy new plant cannot flourish and grow without a constant source of sunlight and water, so it is with Christians. Some things are essential to your walk with Christ. But there are other things that, though not always essential for life, make a plant more healthy, radiant and fruitful — things like warmth, fertilizer, etc. The same is true for Christians. There are some spiritual disciplines that, when practiced consistently, will make you flourish. Ignoring them might not cause spiritual death (at least not immediately), but it will make you a lot less of what God has planned for you.

Read Luke 13:6-9. This is a good illustration of what God expects of Christians. God is willing to supply the “fertilizer,” but if we continually refuse to grow or to take advantage of His channels of blessing, what will happen? (verse 9)

So what are the means of grace that God has established for Christians? How does He speak to us and reach out to us? Through what means does the Holy Spirit communicate with our souls?

Scripture

The Word of God, the Bible, is God’s primary vehicle for imparting His grace to His people. It is through the Bible that you learn how to live, through the Bible that you get to know who God is and how He works, and through the Bible that you receive strength and comfort and direction for your life.

What do these verses say about the inspiration of the Bible? Is it merely the words of men about God, or is it God’s word to men?

2 Peter 1:20-21

2 Timothy 3:16a

The first act of grace that God imparts through Scripture is saving grace. It is only through God's Word that you can come to Christ in the first place. God's Word reveals God's plan, God's Son, God's Gospel. Write out these verses to remind you of the importance and power of God's Word.

Isaiah 55:10-11

Romans 1:16

Romans 10:17

1 Peter 1:23

God's Word imparts not only saving grace, but also sustaining grace. His Word is what will keep you on the right path and sustain you through trials and temptations. Psalm

119, the longest of the psalms, is an acrostic poem which opens our eyes to the importance and the wonder of the Word of God. The words law, precepts, ways, decrees, commands, word, statutes, and promise all refer to Scripture and what God has said in it. Read all of Psalm 119. What do these verses reveal about the benefits of reading and obeying Scripture?

Psalm 119:11

Psalm 119:24

Psalm 119:28

Psalm 119:45

Psalm 119:66

Psalm 119:93

Psalm 119:98-99

Psalm 119:105

Psalm 119:111

Psalm 119:133

Psalm 119:171

Psalm 119:175

The New Testament also tells of the benefits of reading and obeying God's Word. Read 2 Timothy 3:15-17. What is Scripture useful for and what benefit does it provide for us as believers?

From what you've already read it should be obvious that reading the Bible isn't an option for the Christian who is serious about growing — it is critical. It is a vital means of grace. But there are other reasons to read God's Word than just for your own spiritual growth. What reasons do these verses give for reading and knowing God's Word?

2 Corinthians 1:4

2 Timothy 4:2-4

Ephesians 6:11-12, 17

If you are serious about serving God and want to become all that He wants you to be, you will read His Word. You will cherish it more than silver or gold (Psalm 19:10; Proverbs 2:4); you will desire it more than your daily bread (Job 23:12). You must determine in your heart to read it, study it and obey it. How often should you read your Bible?

Joshua 1:8

Psalm 1:2

Psalm 119:97

Prayer

In order to understand the significance of prayer as a means of grace, we need to look back to the Old Testament. God's people, the Israelites, initially worshiped God in a portable sanctuary called the "tabernacle." It was here that sacrifices were made for the atonement of their sins. But it was more than just a place to make atonement; it was also a place to meet with God. In the innermost room of the tabernacle (the "Holy of Holies" or the "Most Holy Place") had been placed the "ark of the covenant," a wooden box overlaid with gold that housed the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. On the top of this box were two golden cherubim which formed the "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" where the very presence of God dwelled. God's presence was separated from the general populous by a thick veil or curtain. The High Priest alone was permitted to enter into the presence of God — but only once a year, and never without a sacrifice for his own sins and

for the sins of his people. In fact, there was such fear that the High Priest would be found unworthy that bells were tied around the bottom of his garment and a rope tied around his ankle so that, if the Lord should strike him dead, they would know (because the bells would stop ringing) and could pull him out by the rope.

Read Mark 15:38. What happened when Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross that directly relates to the tabernacle (or the later temple)? _____

What is the significance of that event according to these verses?

Hebrews 10:19-20

Ephesians 3:12

The good news of the Gospel is that the curtain that had so long divided God from His people has been removed, allowing us to go directly into God's presence through prayer. It is through prayer that God's grace is bestowed on us in special ways. What does the Bible say that prayer brings to us?

Psalms 145:18-20a

John 16:23-24

Philippians 4:6-7

James 5:16

It is important that we understand that prayer isn't manipulating God to get what we want. We don't go to Him with our "wish list," but with a humble heart that wants to meet with God and know *His* heart. You see, prayer doesn't necessarily change God's mind, but it

does change us by purifying our motives, intensifying our desires and molding our will so it conforms to the will of God. Prayer is a time of intimate communion and conversation. What do these verses reveal concerning our attitude in prayer?

2 Chronicles 7:14

Psalm 139:23-24

Psalm 145:18

Matthew 6:5-8

1 Timothy 2:8

James 4:6, 8-10

Are there times when God doesn't listen to our prayers or answer them?

Psalm 66:18

Proverbs 21:13

Isaiah 1:15

Isaiah 59:1-2

James 4:3

1 Peter 3:7

One of the most important things you can do as a Christian is to develop a healthy, regular prayer life. It is difficult to have a relationship with anyone without talking to that person, and the same holds true with the Lord. When do these Scripture verses say you should pray?

James 5:13

Psalm 5:3

Psalm 55:17

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Ephesians 6:18-20

Read the following prayers from the Psalms to help you understand how to pray and try praying these prayers yourself. Jot down some ideas about how these prayers are different and what their purposes are.

Psalm 5:1-12

Psalm 35:1-28

Psalm 51:1-17

Psalm 139:1-24

Psalm 145:1-21

Christian Fellowship

One means of grace that is far too often overlooked is fellowship with other Christians. God never intended for Christians to “go it alone.” What do these verses tell us about the importance of gathering together with other Christians?

Hebrews 10:25

Acts 2:42-47

Hebrews 3:13

Ephesians 4:16

Ephesians 3:10

Matthew 18:20

Those who have given their lives to Christ are considered the “church,” which literally means the “called-out ones.” God’s people have been called out from the world into a new fellowship. Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. This passage doesn’t mean that we should never be around non-Christians. If that were true, we’d never have the opportunity to share the Gospel with unbelievers. But it does say that we shouldn’t look to the world for our fellowship or intimate companionship. What do these verses say about true fellowship?

1 John 1:3

1 Corinthians 1:9

2 Corinthians 13:14

1 John 1:6-7

It is important for you to realize that the moment you became a Christian you also became a part of the Church universal — part of the family of God, the body of Christ. You need to gather regularly with other believers for mutual encouragement, accountability and service. What do these passages reveal about your importance to the body?

Ephesians 4:11-13

Romans 12:4-8

1 Corinthians 12:14-27

If you are truly born again, God has given you a spiritual gift (or gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:11) to build up the body of Christ. Exercising your spiritual gift(s) will help you to grow and become fruitful: it is a means of grace — not just to you, but also to others (read 1 Peter 4:10). But there are other aspects of being a part of a local church that can also be means of God's grace. What are some of your other obligations to the church [remember that the church is people, not a building or meeting place] and in what ways will you be blessed for your faithfulness?

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

1 Timothy 6:18-19

Galatians 6:1-2

Galatians 6:9-10

Colossians 1:28

1 Timothy 4:11-16

Romans 12:9-18

It may be hard for you to step out in faith to begin to develop and use your spiritual gift(s), to share Christ with others, or to begin cheerfully giving to the work of the ministry. Perhaps your self-esteem is too low (making you reluctant to admit that you even have a gift or making you fearful of witnessing to others with confidence) or your finances nearly nonexistent (making generous giving seem an impossibility). But God rewards those who are faithful and who trust in Him and His strength. When we are weak, He is strong. When we take a simple step of faith — no matter how small — God steps in, increases our faith, empowers us for the task, and extends His grace to us. Write out these verses as a reminder of God's grace to you.

Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:19

2 Corinthians 12:9 (first sentence)

The Sacraments

The word "sacrament" comes from a Latin word meaning an "oath of allegiance" or "solemn obligation." It is derived from a word which means "to consecrate." According to Webster's Dictionary, a "sacrament" is "a religious act, ceremony or practice that is considered especially sacred as a sign or a symbol of a deeper reality." Down through the centuries Christians have disagreed over the number of sacraments. Some believe there are seven. Other groups believe there are no sacraments (no rituals to be practiced as a symbol of a deeper spiritual truth). Some just prefer to use the term "ordinance" (a ritual ordained by God) to avoid misunderstandings. Most Protestants hold to two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The body of believers together — the Church — was meant to be the “pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), to publicly and corporately proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to encourage one another to walk in the way of truth. The local church was meant to be a testimony to a lost world of the reality of the Christian faith (Ephesians 3:10). The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (or Communion) do just that. When we participate in these sacraments, we proclaim our allegiance to Christ and commemorate His death and resurrection. It is also a testimony of our unity as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17). Write out the following verses which reveal the necessity of observing these two sacraments.

Luke 22:19

Matthew 28:19-20 a

Perhaps the best way to understand the sacraments is to look back to their Old Testament counterparts. In Genesis 17, God established a covenant with Abraham and commanded all those who would be His people to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:11). Circumcision itself didn’t do anything mystical for the Israelites (i.e., it didn’t “save” them or entitle them to special privileges). It was a solemn act performed as a symbol of their covenant relationship with God. What concept was God really trying to get through to them?

Deuteronomy 10:16

Deuteronomy 30:6

1 Corinthians 7:19

Galatians 6:15

Circumcision was an outward sign of an inward grace already received. It was also a pledge of allegiance and obedience to the covenant God had established. Read Colossians 2:11-12. What New Testament ritual is associated with circumcision? _____

Baptism is a symbol that we have indeed been born again. In a sense, it is our "circumcision," because by being baptized, we make a public proclamation that we are a part of the New Covenant established by Christ and that we are committed to obeying Him. It is also a testimony to the death and resurrection of Christ and to the life that we receive through faith in Him. In the early church baptism was such an important part of the Christian experience, and it was administered so soon after conversion, that it became synonymous with salvation itself. Baptism was considered a means of grace. What spiritual benefits would accompany this outward sign of the inward work of grace?

Acts 2:38

Romans 6:4

1 Peter 3:21

The Lord's Supper (also called Communion or the Eucharist) has its roots in the Passover feast instituted when the Israelites were delivered out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-31). It took ten plagues to convince the Pharaoh to let God's people go. The final plague was the death of every firstborn son in Egypt. What did God's people have to do in order for the angel of death to "pass over" them and to not bring harm on them?

Exodus 12:5-7, 12-13

The annual Passover feast commemorated their deliverance from death and from slavery. It was in the context of the Passover feast that Jesus shared the bread and wine with His disciples the night before He was crucified, commanding them to repeat the act in remembrance of Him. By partaking of the elements in the Lord's Supper, we also commemorate our deliverance from death and slavery to sin through the blood of Christ (the spotless sacrificial Lamb) shed for us on the cross. Why should we celebrate the Lord's Supper according to these verses?

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

1 Corinthians 11:23-28

Means of grace. They express our devotion to God and our thankfulness for what He has done through Christ [the Greek word translated "eucharist" actually means to give thanks]. By participating in them we receive encouragement, guidance, and strength. Through them we commemorate God's saving acts and give testimony to others of our loyalty to Christ and our unity with other believers. Don't cheat yourself out of the blessings God has in store for you. Don't stunt your spiritual growth. Begin today to take advantage of the means of grace. God is waiting to communicate with you and to make you flourish. That's what having a relationship with Jesus Christ is all about.