



Peace Church

Practical

Christian Living

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*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to You, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. ~ Psalm 19:14 NLT*

(319) 377-6600
6600 C Avenue NE, Cedar Rapids IA 52402
Email: office@peacechurch-cr.org ~
Website: www.peacechurch-cr.org

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INTRODUCTION

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" — Abraham Kuyper

We firmly believe that every area of life belongs to God. Since we believe that, the topics in this manual are given to help you live out your Christian life so that you can be part of reclaiming every inch of God's kingdom.

1) SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

There are hundreds of attempts to describe the development of a believer in Jesus. One helpful resource for us has been a book entitled "The Critical Journey, by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich. In this view, there are six stages in the spiritual journey of a Christian. Each stage is a normal, natural and vital part of our spiritual journey. The stages are not exclusive, in that once we reach stage 5, we don't necessarily leave stage 3. We simply grow, retaining the blessings of each stage while experiencing the deeper places of the advanced stages.

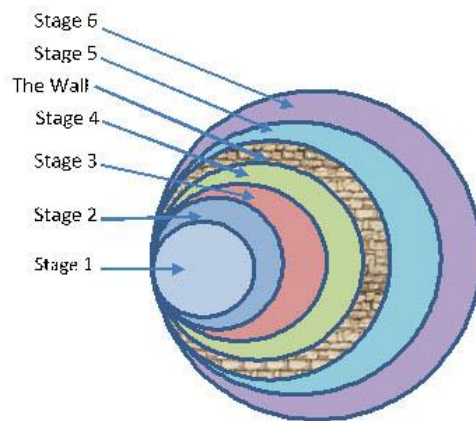
These stages are as follows:

Stage 1: The time of our life when we first realize that there is a God, and that He knows us. This may be at the time of our conversion, or as we grow older in the faith. As we come into contact with God, everything changes, so stage 1 is a time of transition, some uncertainty, but also joy and awe and a growing sense of peace.

Stage 2: Now we know God, we interact with Him, but we relate to God primarily through a person or a ministry. We are dependent on a church or a preacher or a curriculum to maintain a connection to God. This is normal and natural, but somewhat risky. If the church or the person falters in any way, our relationship with God is threatened. Most of the time, however, we are growing in the knowledge and love of God through teaching, preaching and fellowship.

Stage 3: As we've grown in our love for God through a particular ministry, we reach the point where we want to get involved. We have a love and a passion for the activities of our community and we want to contribute. Most church ministries are geared for stages 2 and 3, caring for people and encouraging them in service.

Stage 4: For many people, stage 3 is the end goal for spiritual maturity, to be part of a community as an active participant. There's more to come, but to get there, we need to move through a period of questioning, a time of doubt where some of our deepest convictions are called into question. This stage may be sparked by a crisis or tragedy, by a moral failure by a spiritual leader, a conflict in a church. It may even begin within our own hearts, where we wonder if the Bible is true or if Jesus really is who He says He is. This stage is scary, and people tend to leave this stage in three different ways: 1) Some try to forget the doubts and questions and just go back to an earlier stage, returning to a point where they are too busy to think about these tough questions; 2) Some leave the journey altogether, deciding that everything they once knew to be true was just a lie; 3) Some move through the doubts until they arrive at stage 5. This arrival requires us to completely surrender ourselves to the will of God. We die to ourselves. This transition often happens over a long period of time, where piece by piece we come apart until we have become nothing so that God can become everything. The transition from stage 4 to stage 5 is entitled "The Wall." To move through the Wall, we die.



Stage 5: Having completely surrendered to the will of God, our spiritual life is now less focused on a person or a ministry and is now more focused on our own interaction with God. We are still part of a community, we still participate in the ministry, but we have found that our roles and activities have become less important compared to our relationship with God. We are still a little shaky in stage 5. We may slip back into earlier stages. We may experience some anxiety as we interact with people who exist in earlier stages, who may not understand our experience, but we're growing more comfortable with our relationship with God.

Stage 6: At this stage, we've lost any anxiety we might have had in stage 5. We're comfortable with our interaction with God, even if others can't understand our experience. We serve God alongside our brothers and sisters, but our spiritual health is rooted only in God, who is always faithful.

RESOURCES:

Critical Journey by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich



2) **PRAYER**

Prayer is a valued blessing in our relationship with God. He desires that we pray from our hearts, with all honesty, and in full confidence that He hears and answers our prayers. (*Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 45*)

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Luke 5:16

If Jesus needed time with God alone to pray, how much more do we need to spend time with God in prayer? Prayer means putting aside our busy schedules and taking time to be WITH God – praising Him, confessing to Him, pouring out your heart to Him, giving thanks for His presence in your life, and recognizing He is present in every detail of your life. It is a time for us to worship and sincerely seek God's face. God always hears us, the Holy Spirit cries out for us to God in words we can't express, and He always answers us, however, not always in the way we desire.

"God knows what we need before we ask Him, and in His providence, He meets those needs. Yet, if God knows what we need, why do we pray? To understand the relationship between God's providence and prayer, we must have a right understanding of prayer. While God certainly knows what we need and the desires of our hearts, He calls us to verbalize our needs to Him. The reason He does this is not because He needs to be nudged out of some slumber to act on our behalf, but because prayer benefits us and deepens our dependence on Him." - Ligonier Ministries, "*Why Pray?*" Ligonier.org

Prayer isn't so much for God's sake as it is for ours (John Calvin). Prayer shows our dependence on God, surrendering to His Will and praising Him for His actions in our life. Prayer strengthens our relationship with God. Prayer is not magic, it's not a wish list, it doesn't make demands, and it is not a guarantee against suffering.

A. *Some characteristics of prayer* -

1. It should be done continually. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
2. It must be done in faith. Faith is trusting that God will act in accord with his nature and his promises. (James 5:16)



3. It must be done in humility. (Ephesians 6:18)
4. It must be done in accordance with God's will. (1 John 5:14)
5. It must be done in the name of Jesus. This is more than including a familiar concluding phrase to a prayer. This means that we are to pray for the things that Jesus Himself would pray for. (John 14:14)

B. *Prayers are hindered by -*

1. Unconfessed sin (Isaiah 59:2 & Psalm 66:18)
2. Discord or an unforgiving spirit (1 Peter 3:7 & Matthew 5:23-24)
3. Wrong motives - Often this is in terms of "what's in it for me?" God is not in the business of providing a means for self-centered living. (James 4:3)
4. Disobedience - If we are not ready to listen to and obey God He is not ready to listen to us. (Proverbs 28:9)
5. Busyness: We manage to make time for what is most important to us. We have the time for what we do. (Mark 1:34-35)

C. *God answers prayer -*

1. How? God answers our prayers through His Word, through His Spirit, through His church, through events. Learn to listen to and to obey God's leadings.
2. When God says "No"
 - a. Not God's will
 - b. Wrongful or hindered prayer
 - c. Maybe God has a better plan. While our prayer may be perfectly good and in line with God's will, God who sees the larger picture of our lives may have something better in store for us. While we only see the smaller picture, we may find it hard to understand.
 - d. Maybe God is asking us to wait for any number of reasons.
3. When God says "Yes"
 - a. Be ready to obey.
 - b. Always give thanks.

D. *Suggestions for Confident Prayer -*

1. **Surrender:** Am I completely surrendered into the life of Christ, participating in the Trinity? (Romans 12:1-2)
2. **Remember:** Am I aware of the Father-love of God? (Matthew 7:7-12)
3. **Glorify:** Will my request bring glory to God? (John 14:5-14)
4. **Anticipate:** Has God already promised my request in scripture, or is the Holy Spirit clearly leading me to ask? (2 Corinthians 1:18-22)
5. **Submit:** Am I surrendered to however God chooses to answer? (Matthew 16:21-28)
6. **Ask:** What exactly do I want God to do? (Mark 10:46-51)
7. **Believe:** I expect to receive what I ask for. (John 16:17-33)

E. *Some structures for prayers -*

1. Pray the LORD'S Prayer as a prayer, or as a pattern for your own prayer.
2. Pray the Psalms.
3. Pray the Prayers of Paul, Church Fathers, classical prayers, etc.
4. Various prayer models

A.C.T.S.

Adoration
Confession
Thanksgiving
Supplication/Surrender

P.R.A.Y.

Praise
Repentance
Asking for others
Yourself

My P.A.R.T.

Praise
Admit
Request
Thanks



A.C.T.S.S. Prayer Guide

A – ADORATION/WORSHIP Focus on God's holy character.

Praise God for who he is; his greatness and power; tell God how much you love Him; think of creative ways to praise God (Psalms); List the different names of God, declare the glory and honor of God; Praise Him for his great salvation.

Reflect on God's attributes: He knows everything; is merciful; has all power; is truthful; is always present; is love; is absolutely holy; is eternal; is faithful; changes not; is completely just; is wise; hears prayer; forgives.

C – CONFESSION Spiritual areas of life that are not right before God.

Use the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), Galatians 5:19-21, etc. as guides.

Problems at work, or school, or family; problems with my attitudes.

Reflect upon the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). How can I develop each character quality?

T – THANKSGIVING Be thankful.

For spiritual blessings; for Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension; for Jesus' teachings, and God's Word; for future blessings; for providential care; for family, friends, health, etc.; for answered prayer.

S – SUPPLICATION

Intercession (for others) - family members, co-workers, pastors, missionaries, non-Christians, government, church members, neighbors, friends.

Petition (personal) - Thankful heart, spiritual growth, wisdom, personal weaknesses, struggles, problems, physical health, personal plans, goals, hopes, desires, strength against temptation and for obedience/thankfulness, spiritual gifts, spiritual fruit, needs, God's guidance, emotional health, frustrations, stress, relating to others, forgiving attitude.

S – SURRENDER Tell God why you will obey.

Give God control of your life, your needs, wants, and plans. Surrender your priorities unto God's will and good pleasure. Declare that you are God's servant. Declare that you will submit to God's will in all things. Your life is in God's hands and you do not belong to yourself by to Jesus Christ.

RESOURCES:

Too Busy Not to Pray by Bill Hybels
Seeking God's Face – Praying with the Bible Through the Year – Philip F. Reinders



3) BIBLE STUDY

The Bible is indispensable to the Christian life. Without the written Word, we simply could not know the Incarnate Word. Too often we come up with excuses why not to read the Bible – it's too boring or too difficult to understand.

Many people find the study of Scripture to be an intimidating, if not impossible, endeavor. But God encourages us to put His Word on our hearts (Deut. 6:6, Psalm 119:9,11), and He will open His Word to us if we are faithful to study it with diligence and humility. Consider joining a Bible study or class offered by Peace Church so that you may learn from other Christians. Be sure to make some time each week for the study and contemplation of God's Word. Don't get hung up on the latest or best translation of the Bible, spend time looking for what God's word is teaching you and develop obedience to those teachings. Be encouraged – God speaks in Scripture through the Holy Spirit into your heart.



There are different ways to study the Bible.

1 – Inductive method of Bible study makes observations on a passage of Scripture and draws conclusions based on those observations. Here are some practical steps: (based on Psalm 19)

- a) Background – Who is the author? Why was it written? Learn historical background, dates, key people. A Bible dictionary or online commentary can be helpful. (e.g., Written by David)
- b) Personal Paraphrase – Starting with the first chapter, write out each verse or section of verses in your own words. (e.g., The heavens declare the glory of God Psalm 19:1; God’s glory is seen throughout all the universe.)
- c) Questions and Answers – Write down questions you have about the passage, unfamiliar terms? (Psalm 19:2 – how do the skies “pour forth speech”?)
- d) Cross References – Make note of similar or related passages that come to mind when you are reading, paraphrasing, and asking questions about the passage. (Psalm 19:1 – see also Romans 1:19-20)
- e) Insights – Write down any insights or observations that occur to you related to the passage or background. (Psalm 19:3-4 - God created the sun, moon and stars – things that man has chosen to worship as gods.)
- f) Personal Application – (Psalm 19:12-14 – I need God and His word to show me where I sin. I need to spend time in His word to guide my life.)
- g) Title and Summarize – After completing a verse-by-verse analysis, give it a title and a key verse. (God reveals Himself to Us in His Word and Creation.)

2 – Topical Study – Find a Bible Concordance or use www.biblegateway.com and search a topic (e.g., hope). Look up all the Scriptures that relate to that topic.

3 – Character Study – A biographical study is when you research everything the Bible has to say about a specific person in the Scriptures. Studying great men and women of faith can help you immensely when you begin to piece together the clues about their lives as they are described from various passages in the Scriptures. And studying the lives of people who fumbled in their faith can also serve as a healthy warning about things to avoid in your own life.

4 – Saturation Study – Study a specific passage and read it over and over and over for 30 days or so. See what truths God is speaking into your heart.

5 – Word Study – Take a specific word in the Bible and see how it is used through the Old and New Testaments. (e.g., Spirit)

RESOURCES:

How to Study the Bible Book by Book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
http://www.peacechurch-cr.org/family-life/biblereading.cfm#detailid_352958
http://www.peacechurch-cr.org/family-life/memoryverses.cfm#detailid_352848



4) **PERSONAL DEVOTION/MEDITATION**

At its core, personal devotions are simply the time a believer spends with God. Devotions allow us to come into God’s presence, to deepen and strengthen our relationship with God by reading His Word and meditating on what it says. It may be a time where you read additional devotional materials, sing, and spend time in prayer. God created the desire in us for intimate communion/closeness with God.



It has been said, "The gospel brings man to God; devotions keep Him close to God." James 4:8 reiterates that, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you." Devotional time with God draws you close to God's heart, helps you understand Him more, obey His commands, and firmly hold onto His promises. People who don't believe in God have no desire to spend time WITH God. In fact, they work to keep God out of their lives. (gotquestions.org/daily-devotions)

In devotional time, we don't need to always "study everything". Sometimes we need to focus on allowing God's Word to "soak in".

Romans 12:2 says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." Jon Bloom from *Desiring God* says to think of devotions as exercise/training for your soul. Exercise strengthens the body, refuels and gives energy, provides muscle memory and ingrained reactions (e.g. military training), You need it regularly to build strength, routine, and reap the benefits of guidance, wisdom, and protection.

- a – *TODAY* – <https://today.reframemedia.com/> This is a daily devotional that helps God's people refresh, refocus and renew their faith through Bible reading, reflection, and prayer. Today reaches hundreds of thousands of readers seeking spiritual growth via the Web, email, print, and mobile.
- b – *Our Daily Bread* - <https://ourdailybread.org/> has a daily devotional on their website as well as a booklet you can have mailed to you. There are additional resources available on their website.
- c – *Tabletalk* – www.ligonier.org/tabletalk/ - a daily devotional from a Reformed perspective.
- d – A variety of devotionals resources are available from: www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/
<https://www.oneplace.com/ministries>
- e – For women on Facebook - Proverbs 31 Ministries - <https://proverbs31.org/read/devotions>
Seeing Jesus: Seeking and Finding Him in The Scriptures AND Abundant Life in Jesus by Nancy Guthrie
- f – For men on Internet – www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/niv-devotions-for-men
www.biblegateway.com/devotionals/mens-devotional-bible/today
- g – For families – <https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/family/>
<https://www.josh.org/resources/youth-family/daily-devotions/family/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/spiritual-growth-for-kids/family-bible-reading-and-devotions/family-mealtime-devotions-and-faith-activities>
One Year of Dinner Table Devotions by Nancy Guthrie
- h - **Lectio Divina**, or "divine/holy/spiritual reading", is a form of meditation that includes reading Scripture, prayer, and inviting God to work in your life. The Christian uses the Scriptures to pursue the knowledge of God, wisdom, and holiness through the objective meaning of the text with the aim of transforming the mind according to truth. To prepare, start by choosing the Scripture text; it may be a single text or a set of verses that present a larger concept. Next, find a quiet place and get comfortable. Focus on the in and out rhythm of your breathing. The divine reading happens in four phases. Let this flow naturally. If you get distracted, gently to return to the process.
Phase One - Lectio (Reading): Read the selected Scripture slowly, out loud several times. Listen for a particular word or phrase that God may be using to teach you today.



Phase Two - Meditatio (Meditation): Slowly repeat the word or phrase to yourself. Ask God how this applies to your life. Perhaps engage your imagination to see if any images come to mind.

Phase Three - Oratio (Prayer): Ask God what He is saying to you through this text to transform your thoughts. Thank God for the awareness brought through His Word.

Phase Four - Contemplatio (Contemplation): Be silent, rest, and receive to let God work in your heart and mind.

This process may not come automatically. Keep practicing, and you will gain the benefits from this type of meditation.

RESOURCES:

<https://www.rca.org/lectio-divina>



5) SPIRITUAL FRUIT AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There is a difference between *fruit* of the Spirit and *gifts* of the Spirit.

Spiritual Fruit is to be made evident in the lives of all Christians. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*" We cannot produce fruit if we are not connected to Jesus. All the fruit we are called to bear imitates the very character of God. We need to be nurtured by being in God's Word to produce fruit, otherwise our fruit will be evil. All of these FRUIT (not plural) are one, so none of them is optional.

Spiritual Gifts - When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, He gives us certain gifts that we use to instruct and build up the body of Christ. Every Christian has at least one dominant spiritual gift, and they differ from others. (Romans 12:6) Some of these gifts are: helps/mercy, administration, teaching, hospitality, intercessory prayer, leadership, knowledge, encouragement, service and giving. Those who have the higher profile gifts should not exalt themselves, and those with the behind-the-scenes gifts should not downgrade themselves. What should be remembered is that all gifts are equal in the eyes of God and should be the same in our eyes, too.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:12-13 that God has given each of His children spiritual gifts "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." As believers in Christ, we need to know what our spiritual gifts are and how they may be used in Christ's church and His Kingdom.

We offer a course on spiritual gifts, *Network*, which will be used to help each person make more effective use of their spiritual gifts, or perhaps discover their spiritual gifts for the first time. This course gives participants the tools to discover or affirm their spiritual gifts, assess their heart/interests, abilities, personal style, and experience so they can use their gifts in service to others at Peace Church.

Scriptures on Spiritual Gifts: Exodus 35:31-33; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14; Ephesians 4:7-13; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:12; and 1 Peter 4:7-11

RESOURCES:

<https://network.crcna.org/deacons/you-have-gifts>
<https://network.crcna.org/faith-nurture/discover-your-gifts-online-test-now-free-crc>





6) THANKFUL SERVICE

"Q. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works? A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, is also restoring us by His Spirit into His image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for His benefits, so that he may be praised through us, so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ." Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, Q&A 86)

The good we do is the result of our salvation, not its cause. We can be saved only by faith in Jesus Christ. Our world needs hope, love, encouragement and a kind heart. You can make a difference by serving others in our church, community and/or globally. As believers in Christ, we are called to follow His example: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

God calls us to be his hands and feet, reaching out to a hurting world through love and service. Our members are involved in a lot of ministries and volunteer opportunities. It would be impossible to keep this list complete and current, because members are always discovering new ways to serve!

Peace Church: Nursery; teacher/leader/helper for GEMS, Cadets, Youth Group, Sunday School; coffee prep; office help; worship teams; and many more opportunities. As evidence of your faith, you are expected to give of your time and/or resources as God directs you in the ministries of Peace Church. Your participation helps build a healthy church community.

Cedar Rapids Area Organizations to serve:

Bridgheaven Pregnancy Support Center - <http://bridgehavencr.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

His Hands Free Medical Clinic - <https://hishandsclinic.org/volunteer/>

HACAP – Hawkeye Area Community Action Program - <http://www.hacap.org/how-to-help/how-volunteer/>

Treasures Quality Resale Shoppe - <http://treasurescr.com/volunteer/>

Christian Reformed Churches of North America Organizations:

Back to God Ministries International prayer opportunities - <https://backtgod.net/>

Resonate Global Missions - trains missional leaders, guides new churches, and forges partnerships to proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus Christ worldwide -

<https://www.resonateglobalmission.org/>

World Renew - Compelled by God's deep passion for justice & mercy, we join communities around the world to renew hope, reconcile lives, and restore creation – <https://WorldRenew.net>

Youth Unlimited – service <https://www.crcna.org/opportunity/serve-youth-unlimited> opportunities for teens - <https://www.crcna.org/opportunity/serve-youth-unlimited>

RESOURCES:

<https://network.crcna.org/church-admin-finance/members-using-their-gifts>





7) USE OF YOUR GOD-GIVEN RESOURCES

We believe everything we have comes from God! The apostle Paul wrote, *"We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it"* (1 Timothy 6:7). Every follower of Jesus shares the responsibility of Christian stewardship. Essentially this means that we respond in love to God's abundant outpouring of material blessings by giving what we've been given to help meet the needs of this world. Some of these material blessings include: money, possessions, time, talents. Regardless of the portion of what we've been blessed with, we have the responsibility to give sacrificially for God's mission through His church. We believe Christian stewardship is essential for the health and mission of the church.

The Bible offers some guidelines on what generous and sacrificial giving are. In the Old Testament, God required that a tithe (or 10%) of the fruit of the land be given to Him (Leviticus 27:30-32). With Jesus came a new command, *"For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law—justice, mercy and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things"* (Matthew 23:23).

The Christian Reformed church has a long history of giving abundantly out of the gratefulness of our heart. (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/september-web-only/secrets-of-giving-church.html>)

We are taught to give:

- First – We give of ourselves first to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5). Instead of leftovers or simply a portion, we give to God the first portion: "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of your crops." Proverbs 3:9
- Regularly/Systematically – we give regularly, reflecting God's faithful and regular care for us. "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money...". 1 Corinthians 16:2
- Proportionately – Everyone can participate as "each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income" 1 Corinthians 16:2. Everyone giving in proportion to their income and resources can enjoy the faithfulness of this grace.
- Generously – We give in reflection of God's grace. "Freely you have received, freely give" Matthew 10:8. The abundance of God's grace is naturally reflected in our generous hearts.
- Enthusiastically – We give knowing we are a blessing to God. Moreover, "whoever sows generously, will also reap generously ... for God loves a cheerful giver." God designs that such enthusiasm will be a blessing to us, too, as He promises to "enlarge the harvest of your righteousness" 2 Corinthians 9:6-10.

At Peace, to meet our ministry expenses, to reach out to unbelievers, and to assist believers at Peace to enjoy the blessings of excelling in the grace of giving, the Council recommends every member give at least 6% of their income to the Church Ministries Fund of Peace Church. Further portions of income can be given in addition and/or to other Christian causes.

RESOURCES:

<https://network.crcna.org/deacons/stewardship-series-how-much-should-i-give>



8) PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF PEACE CHURCH

Attending worship services - Martin Luther found corporate worship powerful in awakening his spiritual fire: "at home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through." Life has a way of weighing us down during the week. In Psalm 73:16-17, the Psalmist says, "When I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end."

- A. Worshiping together is a biblical mandate. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us to not give up meeting together. The church is made up of the flock, the body of believers and is not a building. Worship in the local church points us to worship in the church universal: Revelation 7:9
- B. Worshiping together gives us spiritual blessings of fellowship and encouragement. We are encouraged in our faith walk and keeps us from drifting away from God.
- C. Regularly attending church publicly demonstrates our obedience to the command to love and obey God.
- D. Worshiping together allows us to share together in the preaching of God's Word and in the sacraments as well as receiving the graces and blessings that God gives. "Our own awe is accentuated, our own adoration increased, our own joy doubled when we worship Jesus together," David Mathis, www.desiringGod.org.
- E. Worshiping together is a precursor to the gathering of God's people in eternal life. Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

Worship at Peace Church is directed toward God, and expressed according to His expectations and requirements in Scripture. Worship is a dialog between us and God (see chart below). Worship is centered around the Word of God. Each element of the worship service, singing, praying, offering our gifts, confessing our sins, the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, prepares us to hear God speak out of His Bible.

The Worship Sourcebook (a resource for worship planners) explains the following of what happens in a worship service: "God speaks, and God listens. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God challenges us, comforts us, and awakens us. And by the prompting of the Holy Spirit we listen and then respond with praise, confession, petition, testimony, and dedication. Scripture constantly depicts God as initiating and participating in ongoing relationships with people. A healthy life with God maintains a balance of attentive listening and honest speech. So, does healthy worship. This is why our words matter in worship: they are used by God to speak to us, and they carry our praise and prayer to God." (*The Worship Sourcebook, Second Edition - The Practice of Christian Worship*, pp. 15-28.) [Note: this is why there are specific headings in the Order of Worship and on the slides, such as: *God Calls Us to Worship; We Confess Our Sins; God Assures Us of His Forgiveness ...*]

If you were attending an event where your favorite singer was performing or the premiere of a major movie, you would definitely make an effort to be on time. Did you know that God speaks to us from the moment we begin the worship service? Don't miss out on this precious time of hearing God call you to worship Him and bless you.

Generally, our worship services have the following elements. The arrows indicate the direction of communication ↓ - God talks to us; ↑ - we respond to God; ↔ - we mutually encourage one another.



Gathering	Call to Worship ↓
	God's Greeting ↓
	Passing of the Peace ↓
	We Respond with Praise ↑
	Prayer of Confession and Lament ↑ ↔
	Assurance of Pardon ↓
	Thanksgiving ↑
Proclamation	Prayer for Illumination ↑
	Scripture Reading ↓
	Message ↓
Response to the Word	Response of Praise ↑ ↔
	Offering ↑
	Prayers of the People ↑
The Lord's Supper	Declaration of God's Promises and Invitation ↓
	Prayer of Thanksgiving ↑
	Breaking of the Bread ↓
	Communion ↑ ↔
	Response of Thanksgiving ↑
Sending Out	God's Blessing/Benediction ↓
	Our Response of Praise ↑

Joining a Care Group – Care Groups are groups of anywhere from three to twelve people usually who study scripture, pray together, enjoy fellowship, serve others and support one another. They usually meet at least twice a month. This group ensures that basic needs are met within the group, such as meals when someone is sick or has a baby. These are the people who visit us in the hospital, rather than the pastor, elders or deacons. We celebrate with our group, and we grieve together. Our groups offer an element of accountability, where we are asked direct questions about our faith walk. We notice when someone is missing. We know one another, and we are known, in this small group. Members and regular attenders of Peace Church are strongly encouraged to be involved in at least one Care Group.

RESOURCES:

*The Worship Sourcebook, Second Edition - The Practice of Christian Worship
Worship Words, Disciplining Language for Faithful Ministry* by Debra & Ron Rienstra



9) WITNESSING TO OTHERS IN WORD AND DEED

The best way to share your faith with someone is through a relationship. We used to know our neighbors personally. We borrowed a cup of sugar from them, had cook-outs, went to church with them. However, now we drive into our garages and close the door, communicate via text and Facebook, but we don't make lasting connections with those who live right next door. In *The Art of Neighboring*, Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon ask the question: "What is the most loving thing I can do for the people who live on my street or in my apartment building?" Luke 10:27 instructs us to, "'Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Pathak and Runyon focus on getting back to the basics of this command – Love God and Love others. "We don't love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted." Jay Pathak.



Peace Church encourages you to prepare your Faith Story from your Spiritual Journey (See Peace Church Basics Manual). People can't deny the reality of what Christ has done in your life.

Another resource for sharing your faith comes from Billy Graham's website. Here are some quotes:

- You can't open someone's heart to the truth of the Gospel—but God can, by His Spirit.
- God does not call the equipped; He equips the called—and as Christians, we are all called to share what Christ has done.

Work as Worship – rightnowmedia.org. You can watch different conference and ministry videos on sharing God through the way you work and interact with those at work.

RESOURCES:

The Art of Neighboring by Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon
<https://www.workasworshipretreat.org/>
<https://billygraham.org/story/sharing-your-faith-101/>



10) **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

All areas of life, including education, belong to God. We have the important task of raising our children up in the faith of our Lord and Savior and developing them into faithful stewards for the LORD through Christian education at home, at church and Christian schools. Christian Reformed communities have long understood a commitment to Christians schools as an expression of the promises we make at baptism, "to ... help instruct these children in the faith". Christian education gives a firm foundation based on the Bible, where our children are taught about the world from a Christian perspective. Not only does our denomination encourage Christian schools from K-12, we also encourage our high school children to consider a Christian College, especially those that are affiliated with the CRC denomination like Calvin, Dordt and Trinity.

- *Home* – spending time reading the Bible, devotional material and praying together as a family.
- *Church* – through the ministries of Sunday school for children and adults and in weekly programs for all ages.
- *Christian Schools* – area early education: Central Lutheran School, Cedar Valley Christian School, Heritage Christian School, Isaac Newton Christian Academy, Trinity Lutheran School; home schooling; colleges such as Calvin, Dordt, and Trinity.

Reasons for Biblical instruction for children and adults are found in: Psalm 111:10, Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Proverbs 22:6.

Christian School Tuition Support Fund (CSTSF) assists financially with the cost of tuition at approved Christian schools for children of all professing members or regular attenders of Peace Church regardless of need. The Fund's financial support is derived from pledges of members of the congregation and from gifts. Congregational pledges and gifts should be in addition to regular giving for the other ministries of Peace Church. If you have school-age K-12 children, we encourage you to send them to Christian school and apply for tuition support from the fund.

RESOURCES:

Christian School Tuition Support Fund brochure





11) OTHER CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES

There are many other ways for the Christian to practice Spiritual Disciplines. Dr. Richard J. Foster describes these in *Celebration of Disciplines*. "Disciplines do not earn us favor with God or measure our spiritual success. They are exercises which equip us to live fully and freely in the present reality of God - and God works with us, giving us grace as we learn and grow." Spiritual transformation is a process, a journey, not a one-time decision. The disciplines Foster describes are as follows:

- Meditation – hearing God’s voice and obeying His word.
- Prayer – interactive conversation with God.
- Fasting – voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.
- Study – Concentrating on God’s Word to help us learn from it, experience it and be changed by it.
- Simplicity – Being free from anxiety of possessions by remembering them as gifts from God, to be used for God’s glory for others.
- Solitude – A space/time for being found by God and free from the noise and distractions. It is more a state of mind and heart than a place.
- Submission – Through self-denial, we become free of the burden to always need our own way.
- Service – True service builds community. It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others.
- Confession – We experience the grace and mercy of God through the love of our brothers and sisters as they make God’s presence and forgiveness real to us. James 5:16 - "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."
- Worship – As the Westminster Catechism says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." We do this when we offer our whole being in worship throughout every aspect of our lives.
- Guidance – Individually we are guided by the Holy Spirit and Christ’s teachings. Corporately we are to be united together in love and good deeds.
- Celebration – A life "walking, leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:8). Celebrate life in singing, dancing, laughing and celebrating all aspects of life.

RESOURCES:

Celebration of Discipline by Richard J. Foster
<https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines>
Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence by Ruth Haley Barton
A Year with God: Living Out the Spiritual Disciplines by Richard J. Foster



RESOURCES: / ADDITIONAL READING:

Bibles:

The Jesus Storybook by Sally Lloyd-Jones (Preschool – 6th grade)

The Jesus Storybook Bible tells the Story beneath all the stories in the Bible. At the center of the Story is a baby, the child upon whom everything will depend. Every story whispers his name. The Jesus Storybook Bible invites children to join in the greatest of all adventures, to discover for themselves that Jesus is at the center of God's great story of salvation---and at the center of their Story too.

NIV Adventure Bible by Lawrence O. Richards (9-12 year olds)

Full color, Life in the Bible Times, Did You Know? Live It!

NIV, Bible for Teen Girls: Growing in Faith, Hope, and Love (Girls ages 13-18)

Packed with daily readings, highlighted promises of God, challenging insights, smart advice, and open discussion about the realities of life

NIV Bible for Teen Guys: Building Faith, Wisdom and Strength (Boys ages 13-18)

Packed with daily readings, highlighted promises of God, challenging insights, smart advice, and open discussion about the realities of life, this Bible is designed to help teen guys grow in their faith.

NIV Study Bible (adults)

Since its first release in 1985, the Gold Medallion Award-winning NIV Study Bible has become the treasured and trusted companion of over nine million Bible readers. The in-depth notes are coded to highlight notes of special interest in the areas of character study, archaeology, and personal application.

Every Man's Bible NLT, Deluxe Messenger Edition by Stephen Arterburn and Dean Merrill

The Bible for every battle every man faces! This is a man's type of Bible—straight talk about the challenges of life. Every Man's Bible has thousands of notes on topics from work, sex, and competition to integrity and more and trusted advice from the pros, just for men.

Everyday Matters Bible for Women: New Living Translation by Hendrickson Bibles

Created in partnership with Today's Christian Woman, the Everyday Matters Bible for Women is designed to help women develop spiritual practices that will make their lives richer, not harder. It offers practical encouragement and tools to renew, reinvigorate and restore meaning to everyday life. The contemporary language of the New Living Translation combines with content from today's foremost Christian leaders to help readers understand and apply spiritual disciplines.

Life Application Study Bible New Living Translation

The Life Application Study Bible is today's #1-selling study Bible. The notes not only explain difficult passages and give information on Bible life and times but go a step further to show you how to "take it personally," speaking to every situation and circumstance of your life!

Devotionals:

Today - <https://today.reframemedia.com/> also available as an app

Our Daily Bread - <https://odb.org/> also available as an app

Words of Hope - <https://www.woh.org/devotionals/> also available as an app

For young children, 4-10, *Leading Little Ones to God: A Child's Book of Bible Teachings* by Marian M. Schoolland



Websites:

CRCNA Digital Library – library.crcna.org

Daylight – 366 Daily Devotional Readings – Andrew Kuyvenhoven

It's All Grace – The Best of Eppinga – Jacob D. Eppinga

Sixty at Sixty – A Boomer Reflects on the Psalms – James C. Schaap

Twilight – 366 Daily Devotional Readings – Andrew Kuyvenhoven

Renovaré – Renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines

Faith Alive Resources - <https://www.faithaliveresources.org/> (you can find Bible study material for all ages)

Monergism – www.monergism.com a free directory of Reformed theology, it includes free eBooks, courses, mp3 audio files and much more.

Videos:

RightNow Media – rightnowmedia.org – You will be given an invitation by email from the church office.

RightNow Media has Bible studies for new believers, how to pray and read the Bible, books of the Bible, growing your faith, Christian living, defending your faith, marriage, children, teens, men, women, small groups,

What is Reformed Theology? – R. C. Sproul

How to Study the Bible – David Platt

Why We Believe the Bible – John Piper

Land of the Bible – Mart De Haan

The Promised One (and other Bible studies in that series) – Nancy Guthrie

Look at the Book – John Piper

Work as Worship – J.D. Greear

The Pursuit of God in Corporate Worship - John Piper

Faith Lessons – Ray Vander Laan

Desiring God – John Piper

*If you don't have access to RightNow Media, contact the office @ office@peacechurch-cr.org or call 319-377-6600 for an email invite.

Apps:

IDisciple

First 5

Heidelberg Catechism

Creeks and Confessions - Conglomo

Bible by Olive Tree

Bible Gateway

Ligonier Ministries

Bible Gateway – www.Biblegateway.com also available as an app

Bible Study Tools:

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

Young's Analytical Concordance

The New Bible Commentary

Halley's Bible Handbook

NIV Bible Commentary

NIV Study Bible

NLT Study Bible

The Reformation Study Bible

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church

New Bible Dictionary

The Bible Almanac – A Comprehensive Handbook of the People of the Bible and How They Lived



Additional Reading Material:

A Year with God – Living Out the Spiritual Disciplines by Richard J. Foster

Celebration of Discipline – the Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard J. Foster

Critical Journey by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich

How to Study the Bible Book by Book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence by Ruth Haley Barton

Seeking God's Face – Praying with the Bible Through the Year – Philip F. Reinders

The Art of Neighboring by Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon

Too Busy Not to Pray by Bill Hybels

What's Your God Language? Connecting with God through Your Unique Spiritual Temperament by Dr. Myra Perrine

Worship Words, Disciplining Language for Faithful Ministry by Debra & Ron Rienstra

Note: Every effort has been made to cite the resources where information was gleaned from. If you know of a source that is not listed, please let the Peace Church office know: office@peacechurch-cr.org.

