

FIVE MEANS OF GRACE

Welcome to our Small Group studies – each session outline is structured for 55 minutes, but we plan to be online from 8pm and conclude no later than 9.15pm.

GATHERING (5 Minutes)

The opening questions of this segment are based on a reading of a passage in the book and help focus the group on the general theme of the session ahead.

REFLECTIONS ON THE READING (10 to 15 Minutes)

This segment helps participants dig deeply into the central theme of the session by sharing discoveries from the reading and investigating key concepts together. Participation is often structured in pairs or small groups in order to maximize sharing and encourage discussion from those who may be initially reluctant.

The links to the video is on our webpage AND listed in each study. Please open the link to check before you share screen.

When you go to zoom to share screen, check that the boxes are ticked for video optimization and sound sharing from your computer. The video should be heard by others when you are muted.

When the video is playing, keep an eye on the chat – that way anyone who has a comment or question can do so without interrupting the video.

VIDEO SEGMENT (15 Minutes)

The video features Elaine A. Heath, dean of the divinity school at Duke University, a professor of missional and pastoral theology, and author of *Five Means of Grace*. Her conversation partner is Joerg Rieger, professor of theology and Methodist studies at Vanderbilt University. Participants will be able to gain wisdom from their personal reflections on the weekly theme, prompting their own ideas and questions.

VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (10 to 15 Minutes)

These questions prompt the participants to reflect on Elaine Heath's words in the context of their own discoveries.

NOTE – If there are more than 7 people, split into conversation groups by having breakout rooms. Put on a timer.

LOOKING AHEAD AND CLOSING PRAYER (5 Minutes)

The final segment briefly introduces the particular means of grace for the forthcoming week. Each session then closes with a time for the sharing of prayer requests and concerns, encouraging participants to write down each other's needs and remember them in the upcoming week.

The Means of Grace

Are Spiritual Practices

INTRODUCTION

A prodigy is someone with extraordinary talent who seems to instantly pick up a skill or craft that takes others a long time to learn or master. However, even prodigies realize they need to practice, and most people have also experienced what it means to learn a set of practices in order to do a job, play a musical instrument, or enjoy a sport.

Grace in Christian language is properly understood as an unmerited gift from God, freely available to all despite our human shortcomings and flaws. Nothing we can do or say will earn God's faithful love and grace. Yet to stay in love with God—"to attend to God's ordinances"—John Wesley taught all Christians that five practices are indispensable channels for experiencing (not earning) God's grace.

This opening session will help your class

1. explore the concept of grace and why it is a foundational topic for spiritual growth;
2. offer initial impressions of the five means of grace as a baseline for understanding; and
3. commit together to create an environment of support, prayer, and trust.

HYMNS *and* SACRED POEMS.

The Means of Grace.

I.

LONG have I seem'd to serve Thee, Lord,
With unavailing Pain;
Fasted, and pray'd, and read Thy Word,
And heard it preach'd, in vain.

II.

Oft did I with th' Assembly join,
And near thine Altar drew;
A Form of Godliness was mine,
The Pow'r I never knew.

III.

To please Thee thus (at last I see)
In vain I hoped, and strove:
For what are Outward Things to Thee,
Unless they spring from Love?

IV.

I see the perfect Law requires
Truth in the inward Parts,
Our full Consent, our Whole Desires,
Our undivided Hearts.

V.

But I of *Means* have made my Boast,
Of *Means* an Idol made,
The Spirit in the Letter lost,
The Substance in the Shade.

VI.

I rested in the Outward Law,
Nor knew its deep Design;
The Length and Breadth I never saw,
And Heighth of Love Divine.

VII.

Where am I now, or what my Hope?
What can my Weakness do?
J E S U! to Thee my Soul looks up,
'Tis Thou must make it new.

GATHERING (5 Minutes)

Invite participants to listen as you read aloud the following lines from Charles Wesley's twenty-three-stanza hymn "The Means of Grace." Invite students to reflect silently on the words for two minutes. After the silence, have them turn to a person next to them to share what words, phrases, or ideas resonate with them.

1.
Long have I seem'd to serve Thee, Lord,
With unavailing pain;
Fasted, and pray'd and read Thy word,
And heard it preach'd, in vain.

2.
Oft did I with th' assembly join,
And near Thine altar drew;
A form of godliness was mine,
The power I never knew.

3.
To please Thee thus (at last I see)
In vain I hoped and strove:
For what are outward things to Thee,
Unless they spring from love?

Full text - <https://scriptoriumdaily.com/charles-wesley-on-means-of-grace/>

This hymn was written in 1740 as a response to a few early Methodists who questioned the value of worship, Holy Communion, and other means of grace for stimulating or deepening Christian faith. Ask a participant to open the session with a word of prayer.

REFLECTIONS ON THE READING (10 Minutes)

Have the class brainstorm a list of the kinds of groups they are involved in outside the church. That list might include civic organizations, service clubs, recreational sports leagues, work teams, and so on. After the class has come up with that list, have them explore more deeply one or two of the groups on the list. Write up a list of practices that are necessary for each member of the group. For example, for a sports team practices might include “eye-hand coordination” or “blocking and tackling.”

As a class, have everyone reflect on the question, “How does being part of a group shape the practices for the individual members of that group?” Then make the connection to the Christian church. Tell the class that for Methodists there are five means of grace (or five channels for God’s grace) that help Christians stay in love with God:

1. Prayer
2. Searching the Scriptures
3. The Lord’s Supper
4. Fasting
5. Christian Conferencing

VIDEO SEGMENT (15 Minutes)

Video segment featuring Elaine A. Heath, author of *Five Means of Grace*, in conversation with theology professor Joerg Rieger.

VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (10 Minutes)

1. What did you hear? Do you have any stories from your childhood or youth in which someone became God's grace to you? Were these mountaintop experiences or everyday graces?
2. If spiritual practices (prayer, searching the Scriptures, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian conferencing) are really about nurturing our relationship with God, then what are some ways we can be open to the Holy Spirit when we do these things?
3. When we open up to God we discover God's heart for the world. What are some of the real places grace might be sending you and your church?
4. What would a new encounter with God over the next six weeks mean in your life? Your friends' and family's lives?

THE JOURNEY AHEAD (10 Minutes)

A. The Five Means

Have the class refer again to the list of five means of grace that will guide these sessions ahead. As a group, discuss each of the five means, and ask people to share their initial understanding of what that channel means for experiencing God's grace.

- What does it mean, for example, to pray?
- Why is this one of the five identified as important or indispensable?
- What questions do you have about this means of grace?

B. Experiencing God's Love in This Group

Together, come up with a list of ground rules that will define this group's time together. What can participants expect from each other in relation to each of the following commitments:

- being prepared for each session
- listening and contributing to each session
- honoring differences
- resolving conflict

- encouraging honesty and protecting confidentiality
- praying for each other
- being punctual and honoring each other's time
- creating an atmosphere of joy, love, and laughter

After the class comes up with these shared values, have the list printed and displayed for all future sessions. Class members might even choose to sign the list to ritually commit to sharing those values.

LOOKING AHEAD AND CLOSING

PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Have the class share joys and prayer concerns, and invite them to be in prayer for each other over the upcoming week. Invite someone to close in prayer.