**4 - MEANS OF GRACE**

**INTRO: Pic of fresh vegetables (SLIDE)**

Who loves fresh vegetables? Homegrown or from a local farmers market.

The fresher, the better…right?!

Butter bean, field peas, okra, tomatoes, collard greens…gotta watch out when you eat those things. Make sure you don’t get any on your cheek or mustache…or your tongue will slap your brains out.

But vegetables don’t magically appear, do they?

There’s a process. Gardens require a gardener's diligent care.

Been talking about GRACE over the past few weeks.

Prevenient Grace – God is at work in the garden prepping the soil of our hearts to receive and respond to the seed of His Good News

Justifying Grace – the moment when we accept the seed of God’s Redemption (salvation planted within us) through person of Jesus Christ. No effort on our part (lest it becomes something we’ve done) we simply receive what God has offered. Open heart, fertile soil

Then Sanctifying Grace - the process of nurturing a plant from a fragile seedling into a strong, mature plant that produces abundant fruit. This journey requires more than just initial planting; it demands ongoing care and attention. sanctifying grace is the ongoing process of God’s Work, In Us, Over Time to make us more like Jesus

Which brings us to today

Means of Grace:

God is the master gardener, and we are the plants in His divine garden. **Wesley's Means of Grace are the tools He uses to tend to us**. Through practices like prayer, Scripture reading, fasting, and participating in the sacraments, God nourishes our souls, helping us grow in faith, love, and holiness.

Just as the garden needs constant attention and care to flourish, we need these Means of Grace to grow and bear the fruits of the Spirit."

The means of grace are ways God works invisibly in disciples, hastening, strengthening; and confirming faith so that God's grace pervades in and through disciples. As we look at the means of grace today, they can be divided into works of piety and the works of mercy.

WORKS OF PIETY

(SLIDE) **Individual Practices** – reading, meditating and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living, and sharing our faith with others

(SLIDE) **Communal Practices** – regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another), and Bible study

WORKS OF MERCY

(SLIDE) **Individual Practices** - doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others

(SLIDE) **Communal Practices** – seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (for instance Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), and addressing the needs of the poor

**Christians engage in these disciplines to help them deepen their relationship with God, form positive spiritual habits and cultivate authentic expressions of Christian love and compassion.**

**Wesley called them the means of grace, because they are “the ordinary channels whereby he [God] might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace…”**[**The Means of Grace**](https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace)**.**

An example of these “means of grace” being practiced can be found in…

(SLIDE(S) Acts 2:41-47

***41Then those who [***[***m***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ACTS%202&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-26991m)***]gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.42And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45and]sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.***

***46So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.***

Simple spiritual disciplines/practices…God used in powerful ways to reveal Himself.

Worship, prayer, bible study, breaking bread/communion, service, comfort, giving, kindness/compassion

When you think about it, the Means of Grace are similar to our respiratory system – a life giving, repetitive, cycle (intake and outflow)

Illustration: Take a deep breath…hold it until you feel your body urging you to exhale.

Now exhale all the breath from your lungs and wait to inhale. Did you feel your body begin to crave a fresh breath?

Adults typically take 12-20 breaths per minute. All day every day. It’s essential for life.

We do it without thinking about it. It’s the way we were wired by God to meet our needs.

Spiritually, God wired us for His Means of Grace.

1. **We BREATHE IN God’s Grace** (SLIDE)
* In Matthew 22:37 what was Jesus’ response when asked what the greatest commandment was?
	+ ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38This is the first and great commandment.”*** (SLIDE)
* We need the Means of Piety) to develop our of LOVE GOD
* Acts 2 church
	+ Apostle’s doctrine (teachings)
	+ Breaking of Bread (communion – Lord’s supper) 1 Corinthians 11:26
	+ Prayer
	+ Worship v.46
	+ Praising God v.47
* There were done here in the corporate sense to these actions…but they are important personal practices as well.

### [2 Timothy 2:15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Timothy+2%3A15&version=ESV) (SLIDE)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. [**Colossians 4:2**](https://dailyverses.net/colossians/4/2) **(SLIDE)**

### [Colossians 3:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A16&version=ESV) (SLIDE)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

[**Matthew 25:35-40**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/matthew/passage/?q=matthew+25:35-40)– (SLIDE)

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

So there are things which benefit our faith walk. Help us grow in grace.

But then there are those things which, while building our faith, impact those around us…

1. **We BREATHE OUT God’s Grace** (SLIDE)
* Remember what Jesus said the second great commandment was
	+ Matthew 22:39 “***You shall love your neighbor as yourself***” (SLIDE)
* We are to have an impact in the lives of others.
* Early Church in Acts 2
	+ Fellowship (impact of relationships on our faith journey)
	+ Signs and Wonders (seeing answers to prayer/miraculous occurrences – people getting saved and set free – hurts, habits and hangups)
	+ Need meeting (selling possessions/goods and sharing)

We offer what others need – service, willingness to speak up, break chains

Micah 6:8 (SLIDE)

“***He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love [***[***d***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Micah+6&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-22657d)***]mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God***? (SLIDE)

Sounds like the Means of Mercy

Prescribed actions/methods/examples

**Not in legalistic** sense – you must do these to measure up.

But…

**Life giving** – These are natural parts of the Christian life. Without them, we wither and die.

Just as our bodies are wired for air transfer.

Our spirits are wired for life transfer.

God’s LIFE/Spirit in (For us)

God’s LIFE/Spirit out (To Others)

We participate in the means of God’s grace to us…and we become God’s means of grace to others.

Maybe this will help:

Show our Woodlawn Strategy circle graphic

Reach – Connect – Invest – Launch (SLIDE)

(means of grace brought us through this process)

Prepped soil – seed planted – plant nurtured – fruit produced

Then God uses us to Reach others, Connect them to Him, Disciple them and then Launch them out to repeat the process/cycle.

God’s grace isn’t just something that COMES TO US…it FLOWS THROUGH US – to others. We can become a means of grace through which He works!

God works the soil, plants the seed, nurtures fruitfulness in us…so we can be used by Him to work the soil, plant seeds and nurture others.