

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 5 JANUARY 2020



## Old Paths for a New Year

*Christina Fox*

This time of year is filled with all things new.

- We clean out our closets and drawers to make room for the new Christmas gifts we've received.
- We flip the calendar on a new year and consider all the upcoming year holds.
- We set new goals and resolutions to make needed changes in our life.

As Christians, we also sometimes look for the "new" for our spiritual lives.

- We look to new strategies and methods to help us grow in our faith.
- We look for new devotionals or books to inspire us in our growth.
- We may peruse blogs, listen to podcasts, attend conferences and retreats – all in the hopes of finding that one thing we haven't yet tried that will help us grow in our faith.

While we're grateful for new books and can often benefit from new resources, to grow in Christlikeness we don't need a fundamentally new approach. We need an old one.

The Lord has already given us everything we need, and it's been available all along: the means of grace.

### Means of Grace

When Christ commissioned churches to make disciples, He gave simple instructions: "[Baptise] 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" (Matthew 28:19-20). The disciples were to make new disciples by preaching and teaching all that Jesus commanded. They were to then baptise these new believers.

The extraordinary grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, worked through these ordinary means to grow the church. It's the same for us today.

Theologians use the term "means of grace" to describe God's provision for his people. Louis Berkhof defines the means of grace as "objective channels which Christ has instituted in the church, and to which He ordinarily binds Himself in the communication of His grace."

God uses these means to draw us closer to Himself, to commune with us, and to train us in righteousness.

### Ordinary Means, Extraordinary Grace

What are these means? According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, they are primarily:

- God's Word,
- His sacraments,
- and prayer.

In the book of Acts, the church grew through these very things: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

And in all the generations since, God works using the same ordinary means. It's how He feeds and

nourishes us spiritually. It's how we abide in Him. It's how we know Him. It's how we grow.

As Michael Horton writes, "Through these means, He has pledged to raise us from spiritual death, to forgive sins, to assure us of God's favour, and to conform us to Christ's image."

*For the good of our souls, we can't forsake gathering with God's people to listen to His Word read and preached every Sunday.*

## Word of God

While books *about* the Bible are useful, they can't replace reading God's Word and hearing it preached. God's Word is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Not only that, but "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). For the good of our souls, we can't forsake gathering with God's people to listen to His Word read and preached every Sunday.

## Sacraments

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are also means of grace. By the water of baptism, God seals us as His own (Acts 2:38).

By the bread and cup He communicates Christ and His benefits (1 Corinthians 10:16). Christ meets us at His table, refreshing and nourishing our souls as we remember His sacrifice for us at the cross.

## Prayer

Prayer is how we communicate with our Father, responding to what He's taught us in His Word. In prayer, we praise and honour the One who made us, saved us, and sustains us. We confess our sin and ask God to meet our own and other's needs.

As we pray, we live out our union with Christ and others. And the Lord uses those prayers to carry out His sovereign will.

## All of Grace

The phrase "means of grace" reminds us that, from beginning to end, our life in Christ is all of grace. Our justification was by grace, our sanctification is by grace, and our glorification will be by grace.

We are not transformed by our ability to read Scripture, or how well we listen to it preached, or how fervently we pray, or how faithfully we take communion. We are transformed by the Spirit's use of these means, by God's grace and for Christ's glory.

We need to walk an old path in the new year.

*This new year,  
cease your restless  
searching for the  
next new thing...*

- We need to read and hear the Word preached.
- We need to come to the throne of grace in prayer.
- We need the sign and seal of baptism, and we need to join our local church in celebrating the Lord's Supper.

This new year, cease your restless searching for the next new thing; rest instead in what God has already given, trusting that He will use those means to complete the work He's begun in you.



*Christina Fox received her master's in counselling from Palm Beach Atlantic University.*

*She serves on the Presbyterian Church in America's national women's ministry team and is the editor of their blog*

*encourage.pcacdm.org. She is a writer, speaker, and author of several books, including:*

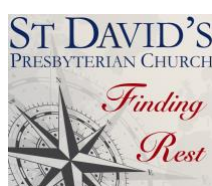
- *Closer than a Sister*
- *Idols of a Mother's Heart, and*
- *Sufficient Hope: Gospel Meditations and Prayers for Moms.*

*You can find her on her website [christinafox.com](http://christinafox.com).*

Source: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/old-paths-new-year/>

For the complete library of St David's Articles, please go to [rest.org.au](http://rest.org.au)

**Kindly pass on this article.**



**We seek to promote and share biblical teaching for the benefit and encouragement of all.**

Our regular Sunday services are at 9:30 am at 46 Mary Street, North Toowoomba.

You are warmly invited to attend. [rest.org.au](http://rest.org.au)