



WESTMARK ESSENTIALS

The Gospel, Discipleship, Baptism, & Membership

/// WELCOME

Welcome to our Westmark Essentials class. This class is designed to introduce to you the Gospel, Discipleship, Baptism, and Membership at Westmark Church. We would have no greater joy than to help root you in the gospel of Jesus Christ and equip you to take your next faith steps. We will meet several times, have some reading to accomplish apart and together, as well as begin some new rhythms of grace for your life.

You might be confused about the Bible, curious about the Church, or really captivated by Jesus—maybe all three! It's also possible that you're using this material as a refresher course or simply exploring what Westmark believes and practices. Wherever you're starting from, this information and the time spent together is designed to be a springboard into the most important conversations you can have. So, please ask questions and seek clarity together.

All of us need to be rooted and equipped in the gospel essentials if we want to grow. It is absolutely vital that we look to good news of God's rescuing love to believe and to thrive. We hope that this time brings growth and thriving. Returning to the essentials of the faith will revitalize all believers and provide solid foundations for new believers to build on for years to come.

In the Bible, we read that Paul and his church planting teams made many new disciples by proclaiming the gospel, but they didn't stop there. They rooted these disciples in gospel essentials and strengthened them so they would walk with Jesus faithfully. When Paul was torn away prematurely from the new believers in Thessalonica, he became concerned that they might not stand firm in the Lord. That caused him to deploy Timothy, a coworker in the gospel, to establish them in their faith. Paul then wrote to them,

"Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith..." — 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2

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Rooting new disciples and church members in gospel essentials was practiced by the early church and this has continued down through the centuries. Westmark Essentials is a contemporary approach to a biblical and historical practice. It not only roots a participant's understanding in the essentials of the faith, but it also encourages one's heart to delight in God's grace while preparing to tell their story and the gospel story and commit to a church body. Read, reflect, and answer questions in each of these four sections:

/// SECTION 1

PG 3: Rooting You In The Gospel

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PG 15: Rooting You In Discipleship

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PG 26: Equipping You For Your Next Faith Step: Baptism

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/// SECTION 1: ROOTING YOU IN THE GOSPEL

What is the Bible about? That's a big question. You could answer it a lot of ways: it's about battles, miracles, rescue missions, love stories, betrayal, reconciliation, and answering hard questions. You could answer with any of those, and you wouldn't be wrong. But what is the Bible about in the most complete and full way? The answer is Jesus. Jesus explicitly taught that he was central to the grand story in Scripture. He made this point when he corrected the religious leaders who had the Scriptures but were missing out on life found through a relationship with him (John 5:39-40). After Jesus rose from the dead, he continued to teach that all Scripture points to him and the gospel (Luke 24:26-27, 44-53). This preeminence of Jesus and God's grace offered through him is written about over and over again throughout the Bible. That's why we emphasize the person and work of Jesus Christ as central for both unbelievers and believers. We never graduate from this good news to us about Jesus, so it is wise to be rooted in it.

Though much more could be included here, it's helpful to be rooted in the gospel using a memorable story and a short creed. After you read The Story and The Creed, respond to Jesus Christ and record your responses below.

THE STORY

The following pages are the summary of a true story. It is like many good stories you've heard or read, but the more you read, the more you'll realize this is not just another story — it is THE story. It defines us all. It makes us think about who we are and who we can become.

The story is broken into 4 small sections:

1. Creation / How did it all begin?
2. Fall / What went wrong?
3. Rescue / Is there any hope?
4. Restoration / What will the future hold?

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You can also read or watch The Story online at <https://thestoryfilm.com/watch>. Others may prefer to download The Story app to their phone or tablet. Additionally, see <https://thestoryfilm.com/apps> about downloading the app to read or listen to The Story.

CREATION – HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

GOD

The story begins with God, who has always been. He has always existed, and he has always existed exactly as he is now. If it seems confusing, it's because he's beyond what anyone can fully comprehend. (Genesis 1:1, Isaiah 40:28)

CREATION

In the beginning, God spoke and everything came into existence. By his command, the entire universe was created and filled with a dramatic display of galaxies, stars, and planets— including Earth, on which was a perfect garden of paradise called Eden. Of all the beauty he created, the masterpiece was a man and a woman. God made Adam and Eve in his image to reflect him. They were created with the grand purpose of worshipping him by loving him, serving him, and enjoying relationship with him. (Psalm 8:3, Isaiah 40:26)

HARMONY

By God's design, all of creation was in harmony and was exactly the way it was supposed to be. During this time there was no pain, suffering, sickness or death. There was complete love, acceptance, and intimacy between God and man, between Adam and Eve, and throughout creation. But something tragic happened... (Genesis 1:31)

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FALL – WHAT WENT WRONG?

DISOBEDIENCE

Adam and Eve were far from being equal to God, yet he lovingly placed them in charge of all he had created in Eden. He gave them the freedom to make decisions and govern the earth with one rule: not to eat fruit from a specific tree. One day, God's enemy, a fallen angel named Satan, wanted to overthrow God so he took the form of a serpent and lied to Adam and Eve. He deceived them into thinking God was not good and did not have their best interest in mind. As a result, they knowingly disobeyed God. In rebellion, Adam and Eve ate the fruit, deciding that they, not God, would determine right and wrong. (Genesis 3:1-6, Romans 3:23)

CONSEQUENCE

The consequences of their actions were devastating! Like a virus, sin entered into all of creation and into the hearts of Adam and Eve. Sin, suffering, and pain were passed down from generation to generation; all of creation was distorted from its original design. We have all read or heard the stories of war, poverty, disease, greed, and scandals that plague our world today. Those are all a result of sin. (Genesis 3:7-8 Isaiah 53:6)

NEED

When we think about the perfection and love that existed at the beginning of creation, we realize "we are far more flawed and far more sinful than we can dare imagine." Just think of the grudges we've held, the lies we've told, the thoughts we'd never dare say aloud. An honest glance into our own hearts reveals the truth: We are all guilty. Everyone has sinned, and the ultimate consequence, even worse than physical death, is eternal separation from a loving God, in terrible misery and unhappiness. Because of all this, we need to consider the questions: Can anything be done? Is there any hope? (Romans 3:10 Romans 5:12)

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RESCUE – IS THERE ANY HOPE?

PROMISE MADE

God removed Adam and Eve from Eden as a result of their sin but left them with a promise of rescue and hope. He promised them one of their descendants would someday rescue mankind from sin. Over the next centuries, God prepared the way for this person who would become the Savior of the world. Exact details of his birth, life, and death were recorded in the Bible many centuries before his coming. In fact, the whole Bible ultimately points to this one person as the focal point of all human history. His purpose in coming was “to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). So, who was he? (Isaiah 7:14 Isaiah 9:6)

PROMISE KEPT

The promised Savior, simply, was God. God became human in the person of Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago, fulfilling all the predictions in the Old Testament. Jesus’ birth was miraculous since his mother was a virgin. His life was unique: he perfectly enjoyed and obeyed God without sin. This ultimately led to his agonizing death on a cross as he willingly, obediently, and sufficiently died to pay for the sins of mankind, according to God’s plan. In the greatest display of mercy and grace the world has ever known, Jesus’ life and death became a substitute for all who would trust in him. The perfectly innocent died to rescue the hopelessly guilty from sin and Satan.

But the grave couldn’t hold Jesus. Three days later, Jesus emerged from his tomb, fulfilling his earthly mission to defeat sin by dying on the cross and to defeat death by rising from the dead—just as God promised. Forty days later he returned to Heaven where he reigns as the rightful King.

But the story doesn’t end there... (Colossians 1:13, 1 Peter 3:18)

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RESTORATION— WHAT WILL THE FUTURE HOLD?

ALL THINGS NEW

For all those who trust in Jesus alone, God has also promised he will make all things new. The new heaven and new earth will be completely free of sin and selfishness—a place of perfect friendship with God, others, and all creation. No more shattering earthquakes, devastating tsunamis or violent storms will plague the earth. No more pain, broken hearts, sickness or death to trouble us. Everything will be restored to the way it was meant to be. The new earth will once again be the perfect home God intended for his creation. God’s original purpose will flourish, as those who trust in his rescue will enter into the grand purpose of worshipping him by loving him, serving him, and enjoying relationship with him forever. (Revelation 21:4)

FOREVER WITH GOD

The most wonderful part of this new world is that we will be with God forever, experiencing complete joy. We will be restored to a perfect relationship with the One who created, loved, and died for us. C. S. Lewis, scholar and children’s author, compared the first step into this new world as “Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” (Revelation 22:3-5, II Corinthians 5:8)

WHAT'S YOUR PART IN THE STORY?

God is writing an amazing story from creation to restoration. He created you to be a part of that story to worship him, serve him, and enjoy relationship with him. By joining God in his story, you will find forgiveness, purpose, and satisfaction as you come to know the author of life. (Matthew 11:28-29)

RESCUE BY FAITH ALONE

Faith is simple trust in Jesus Christ alone to save you. It means instead of believing you can rescue yourself from the consequences of sin, you transfer your trust to the rescue he purchased for you

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by his death. Your allegiance is now to Jesus, the King. Those who place their trust in anything other than Jesus will find themselves forever separated from the loving God who gave his one and only Son to set us free from the bondage of sin. This painful separation is called Hell. (Ephesians 2:8–9, John 3:16)

RESPONSE

God is inviting you to be part of the story he is writing throughout the ages to come. He is offering salvation to you today, which is your invitation to the rescue God offers. You can embrace the rescue of God by simply:

- Admitting your need to God
- Asking him to forgive you
- Trusting in Jesus alone to rescue you
- Following Jesus Christ, the king of your life, in faith from this day forward

The Bible uses the word “faith” and the word “repentance” to capture this idea. We are turning away from the broken way of living (repentance) and we are turning toward Christ (faith). When we respond to Jesus, we are turning away from death and turning toward life. *Are you ready to make that decision? If so, pray to God and ask him to save you.*

The moment you trust Jesus Christ, you become a child of God and his Spirit begins to live inside of you. You have become part of his story. The more you grow in your relationship with God, the more of his story you will begin to see and understand in your life. All of your sin, past and future, is forgiven, and you now find total acceptance before him. When you begin this relationship, Jesus promises to be with you through all the ups and downs and in the joys and difficulties of this life. He loves you with an everlasting, unchanging love. Not only has he promised eternal life, but he came so that you could also experience purpose, fulfillment, and freedom in this life (John 6:47). This is the good news that the Church has always believed.

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THE CREED

When reading and writing was less accessible the church wrote short creeds or summary statements about the faith. They were used by the early church and down through the centuries to help believers grasp the essentials and to be memorable. Believers learned these as they prepared for baptism. These encapsulated gospel truths were also used to protect believers from false teachings that distorted the gospel. These helpful summaries of the faith were circulating at the time of the writing of the New Testament. The disciples of Jesus wrote in Scripture to be faithful to protect, practice, and proclaim sound doctrine with the help of the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 6:20- 21; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 4:1-4; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 1 John 4:1-6; Jude 3). Short creeds can help with this. An example of one of these is referred to by Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church. He wrote,

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” — 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Even after the New Testament was written, we learn that church leaders continued using brief summaries of the faith based on Scripture to instruct and protect against false teaching. One of the most famous creeds is called The Apostles’ Creed. It’s named this, not because the apostles wrote it, but because it reflects a good summary of the faith the apostles of Jesus proclaimed and passed on that we can now read about in Scripture.

Read aloud through the Apostles’ Creed at least twice. As you do, notice that it is an affirmation of belief in the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When reading, listen to how much of the creed is focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and ponder all that it affirms.

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THE APOSTLES' CREED¹

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic² church,
the communion of saints³,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Footnotes:

¹*Modern English Version: From the English Language Liturgical Commission, 1988.*

²*catholic = universal or world-wide.*

³*saints = believers set apart by faith in Jesus Christ.*

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YOUR RESPONSE

What has been your personal response to the good news of God's grace presented in The Story and The Creed? Some people accept it and turn to Jesus, others will cling to their morality and argue that they don't need Jesus. Others still will cling to their immorality, convincing themselves that they don't need Jesus. Both are prideful responses.

We read about different responses to Jesus in Luke 15. Jesus ate and socialized with sinners who responded to him with faith. As he ate and socialized with them, the proud religious leaders responded by trying to censor him for being too friendly with sinners. Jesus then told a parable about two brothers who represented the need for repentance by two groups of people who were both estranged from God, the immoral and the moral. These two groups still exist today.

Read the story for yourself and see if your story lines up with any of the characters.

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven

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and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.
²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹“ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

— Luke 15:11-32

The two brothers are very different. But even though they are very different, both can’t make a great life for themselves by themselves. We see them make futile attempts at self-saving that still leave them estranged from God. Immoral people often try to fill their emptiness by “doing their own thing” or choosing a lifestyle they know is wrong in God’s sight. Individuals from this group can find forgiveness and full acceptance when they turn back to God with faith in Jesus. This group was represented by the younger brother in the parable Jesus told. Another group is the moral crowd, who are often religious. Individuals in this group need to repent of self-righteous efforts to save themselves by their own good works, represented by the older brother in the parable.

The Younger Brother needed to stop trying to find meaning and purpose in pleasure, the Older Brother needed to stop trying to find meaning and purpose in performance. Lost in immorality or lost in

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morality—both are lost. But Jesus' point is that if we turn back to the Father who loves us, he will bring us into the home, not because of what we did or didn't do, but because of his love for us.

Which group have you found yourself in? Remember, God sent his Son to rescue us from our sin and its consequences and to offer us hope. This good news is offered to both the selfish and self-righteous sinners. Anyone who turns to God from their self-saving efforts and trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ is saved. God graciously promises forgiveness, a reconciled relationship with him, and eternal life to all who trust in Jesus Christ alone.

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REFLECT

Are you trusting Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Explain briefly.

What excites you the most about the gospel story of God's grace to you through Jesus?

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/// SECTION 2: ROOTING YOU IN DISCIPLESHIP

A NEW LIFE BEGINS WITH A NEW IDENTITY

Everyone who is united to Jesus Christ by faith receives a new identity under grace. Imagine a new life starting with none of the guilty record that used to be attached to your old name. The Bible often refers to our union with Christ and this new standing under grace simply as being “in Christ.” Being in Christ by faith means we are no longer under condemnation and God’s wrath. Rather, God now sees us his fully accepted and beloved children. The things we desire most in the universe: to belong and to be beloved—that are ours in Christ!

In our past we used to do a lot of things in order to make us feel like we belong or to make us feel beloved. We know what it’s like to “look for love in the wrong places” and it never ends well. The Bible tells us that this is more than just being confused, its actually idolatry. We are setting up things in the place where God should be. God should give us meaning and purpose, not our work or relationships. God should make us feel safe and important, not our sexuality or experiences. As Christians we are given a new identity that doesn’t need idols, we are free to stop chasing cultural and heart idolatry. Being in Christ gives us reason to celebrate!

LEAVING IDOLATRY

Paul rejoiced with the new believers in Thessalonica and affirmed their genuine response of faith in the gospel. He wrote that others gave a good report that they had “turned to God from idols” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). This is important for us too, because like these Thessalonian believers, God’s grace frees us to stop practicing our functional idolatry and to instead experience life in Jesus. This doesn’t mean that a believer won’t lapse or be tempted to return to familiar idols, even if these never ultimately satisfy. Being aware of our functional idols can help us avoid compromise and reject these failing attempts to satisfy our hearts. This is important because King Jesus requires exclusive allegiance to his supremacy. Also, because he is the ultimate treasure that truly satisfies the heart (Matthew

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13:44; Mark 8:34-38; Colossians 1:18). The good news is that we can now find our greatest delight in Jesus and the gospel of God's grace, but we must leave our functional idolatry.

The following twenty statements will help you probe the functional heart idols you need to reject as a failing attempt to find life apart from Jesus. Before you start, pray and ask God to help you with this next exercise. Begin by reflecting on the 20 statements below to deeply probe your functional idols (adapted from pp. 203-204 in *Counterfeit Gods*, Timothy Keller). Identify the top one or two areas of functional idolatry that you may personally struggle with at times.

After you have identified areas of idolatry, then continue to the biblical texts about God's gracious rescue of you and your true identity in Christ.

PROBING FUNCTIONAL IDOLATRY

"Life only has meaning / I only have worth if..."

1. ... I have power and influence over others. (Power Idolatry)
2. ... I am loved and respected by _____. (Approval Idolatry)
3. ... I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life. (Comfort Idolatry)
4. ... I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____. (Control idolatry)
5. ... People are dependent on me and need me. (Helping Idolatry)
6. ... Someone is there to protect me and keep me safe. (Dependence Idolatry)
7. ... I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.
(Independence Idolatry)
8. ... I am highly productive and getting a lot done. (Work Idolatry)
9. ... I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work.
(Achievement Idolatry)
10. ... I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.
(Materialism Idolatry)

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11. ... I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in its activities. (Religion Idolatry)
12. ... This one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me. (Individual Person Idolatry)
13. ... I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality. (Irreligion Idolatry)
14. ... My race or culture is ascendant and recognized as superior. (Racial/Cultural Idolatry)
15. ... A particular social grouping or professional grouping or another group lets me in. (Inner Ring Idolatry)
16. ... My children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me. (Family Idolatry)
17. ... Mr. or Ms. "Right" is in love with me. (Relationship Idolatry)
18. ... I am hurting, in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt. (Suffering Idolatry)
19. ... My political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power. (Ideology Idolatry)
20. ... I have a particular kind of look or body image. (Image Idolatry)

REFLECT

What are the top one or two areas of functional idolatry you may struggle with? (from the list above or another type of idolatry in your heart that wasn't on the list)

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RESCUED ‘IN CHRIST’

Everyone who repents and believes the gospel receives a new standing in Christ. You didn’t earn the new identity; it was just given to you because of God’s kindness—his grace. This new identity under grace helps us experience joy and walk in freedom. However, we all have some bad “tapes” and “scripts” running through our head and heart that may keep us in bondage to empty idols or to sinful practices that God has rescued us from in Christ.

Apart from Christ we needed God’s rescue. But now in Christ, God’s rescue has provided all believers a new standing under grace that’s filled with hope. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has rescued you from your old condition to a new identity in Christ. Scripture declares,

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

The following sampling of biblical passages contrasts who you were apart from Christ with who you are now in Christ because of God’s rescue. Record in the right column spaces the truths about who you are in Christ. Then, read through all that these verses affirm about who you are in Christ now, in contrast to who you were apart from Christ.

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APART FROM CHRIST I WAS...	"IN CHRIST" I AM NOW...
Luke 15:8-10, 3-7, 32: lost	Luke 15:7, 10, 32
John 3:18: condemned	John 3:18
Romans 2:5: storing up God's wrath	Romans 2:5
Romans 5:10-11: God's enemy	Romans 5:10-11
John 1:12-13: not God's child	John 1:12-13
Ephesians 2:4-6: spiritually dead	Ephesians 2:4-6
Colossians 1:13: under the domain of darkness	Colossians 1:13
Romans 3:9-10, 20: unrighteous & my works would never cause God to declare me justified (right with him)	Romans 5:1
Romans 8:9: without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit	1 Corinthians 6:19-20
John 10:26: without the Good Shepherd	John 10:27-30
Ephesians 2:11-12: stranger to the covenants of promise... far off...cut off by a dividing wall of hostility from God's people	Ephesians 3:6
Ephesians 2:12: without hope and God in the world	Titus 2:13

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REFLECT

Now that you've considered this good news about your rescue, it's time to celebrate! List below the top one or two biblical truths about your rescue and your true identity in Christ that's most encouraging to you.

After you've listed these, pause and pray. Talk with God and confess any known idolatry. Remember what God has said in his word about your true identity, then thank God for his grace to you in Christ. Record your experiences and thoughts.

As our hearts are captivated with the spiritual blessing we have in Christ under grace, we are motivated to love and serve Jesus more faithfully as his loyal disciples. We must remember, grace is never a license to disobey God. Rather, God's grace to us fuels our motivation to love him back with steadfast loyalty, godly living, and all-out-service for others in love (1 Cor. 15:58; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 4:10-11). Now that you have been reflecting on God's love and grace for you in Christ, it's time to personally love God back with your actions. Record below just one step of obedience or act of service you will freely take that you believe will honor God.

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RESCUED INTO DISCIPLESHIP

God has rescued us out of death and into life. He has rescued us out of isolation and into community. So, what does it look like for you to have life in community now? What will it be like to walk with Jesus?

A disciple must take responsibility for their daily walk with Jesus. That means connecting daily with Jesus personally and learning from him through Scripture. Any relationship needs to have healthy communication: from you to Jesus and from Jesus to you. If you want to be a healthy, growing disciple of Jesus you need to grow a lifestyle of personal reading and prayer as time alone with God. That said, no one walks alone!

The Bible is clear that all disciples of Jesus are to connect with other disciples in the church. The New Testament regards local churches as communities of disciples (Acts 6:1-7; 11:26; 14:21-23). We need relationships with other gospel-centered disciples as we learn to obey Christ's commands, grow in his likeness, and make more disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:41-47; Colossians 1:28-29; 3:15-17; 4:2-6, 12). God has provided analogies in the Bible to help us understand how we are to connect relationally and function as part of his local church. We are to think of ourselves as God's household, Christ's body, and ambassadors of reconciliation, to name a few. Together as God's household, we love our heavenly Father back because of his love for us. Despite our differences, God calls us to love all our brothers and sisters in Christ and to welcome new family members the Father is adopting who had been spiritual orphans just like we were (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:12-17; 15:5-7; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 1 John 4:7-21). As his body, we are to stay connected with Christ the head, and we are to serve interdependently with our diverse gifts and abilities to build up his body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-12; Ephesians 4:11-16). As ambassadors of reconciliation, together we enjoy our reconciled relationship with God, we model reconciled relationships with one another, and we urge unbelievers to be reconciled to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:13-16; 5:15-21). God has designed us to grow and serve in community with others. Therefore, each individual disciple needs to

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engage with a local church body for biblical teaching, worship, group life, service, and disciple making mission.

DISCIPLESHIP MEANS ‘FOLLOW ME’

Jesus said *“The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!... Come, follow me”* (Mark 1:15, 17a). When we realize the good news of the kingdom of God, then we want to leave this broken kingdom and follow King Jesus. Instead of putting ourselves in the center of our universe and on the throne of the kingdom, we worship King Jesus as the center of it all. Our lives become centered on and driven by our love for Jesus.

Living with this focus and affection is what we mean by “following Jesus.” In obedience, we leave behind the old life and follow him. We become his disciples. In the first century a teacher would collect students that would literally follow them around, eating with them, sleeping where they slept, and learning all they could as they sat at the teacher’s feet. Today, we follow Jesus: going where he leads, resting in what he provides, and learning by sitting underneath his teaching. We are being discipled.

But more good news is that we don’t live that discipleship alone. God has designed the church to disciple one another as we grow to look more like Jesus. At Westmark we have a simple way to categorize and communicate the discipleship process. Now, be gracious as you read through it. Discipleship is about relationship; relationships are messy and complex. The simplicity of the Discipleship Pathway looks great on paper, and it tends to be the usual progression, we also know that life is more complicated than this little diagram. Still, hopefully this is helpful for providing an overview and direction to how discipleship works in the church.

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DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

Connection ➡ Community ➡ Communion ➡ Character ➡ Commission

Connection is where Westmark begins a relationship with someone. This could be from something as simple as attendance at an outreach event, an invitation to church, or an interaction on social media.

Community is where relationships are formed and people begin to be known and know others well. This takes place in Small Groups, around round table discussions, in Discipleship Groups, or at the Sunday morning gatherings. Consistent gatherings begin to allow people to actually start loving one another as real friends.

Communion is where relationships between both God and other Christians are discovered as absolutely vital. This takes place when someone truly repents and trusts in Jesus to save them. They begin to pursue baptism and find fellowship with the Lord and his people through the Lord's Supper and gathering to worship regularly.

Character is where our sanctification becomes a focus and our pursuit in life. Sanctification is when God grows us to look more like Jesus and the person he created us to be. By securing the Four Pillars in their life people will chase transformation in the Spirit toward Christlikeness through discipleship together.

Commission is where the call to lead others in the Discipleship Pathway is increasingly taken on as a personal responsibility and matched by the increasing capabilities. Through serving and reaching out, we all find how God is putting us on mission right where we are.

Based on those big categories, where would you put yourself? _____

What do you think is the next step in your Discipleship journey? _____

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THE 4 PILLARS

Word: we need to be in the Word of God, the Bible. It's so necessary for us to have the regular intake in personal time as well as corporate time. Of course, the Bible can be confusing and complicated if you don't know how to read it. We all need to take the time to be taught how to read the Bible through careful listening of sermons, classes, and discipleship under people who can teach us to understand the Bible well.

Prayer: A relationship will only grow if there is healthy communication. Reading the Bible is our primary way to hear from God and praying is our primary way to speak back to him. We all need to work on developing a robust prayer life, and that doesn't come naturally for most of us. Anyone who wants to grow close to Jesus needs to upkeep intimate communication with God, both in corporate settings and personally.

Family: We have to have authentic relationships where we can be held accountable and be encouraged in our growth. The reality is that all of us just simply need help. We need a church family around us who will call us up and call us out. We need people who love us enough to help us in many different ways. That can only take place as we are humble enough to be transparent and follow him into obedience of "bearing one another's burdens."

Share: Somethings flourish when you give them away, but they rot when you keep them for yourself. God has given you gifts to give away to others. When we do that, we are met with the upside-down logic of the Kingdom of Jesus that is more blessed to give than to receive. Everything from time, money, skills, love, all the way to prayers, compassion, and mercy. We need to give away what God gave to truly experience how he wants us to grow: as servants. Once we truly start serving others, then we can start seeing why God made us the way he did.

Which pillar are you strongest in? _____

Which pillar do you feel weakest? _____

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ROOTING YOU IN A DISCIPLESHIP RELATIONSHIP

At Westmark Church we have a number of different ways to disciple people. The most common are Discipleship Groups, Small Groups, 1x1s, and Equipping Classes.

Discipleship Groups (DGs): Gendered groups that meet for a semester at a time, usually for around 60-90 min weekly. Through reading the Bible together and discussion, they help one another Follow Jesus, be Formed by Jesus, and Fish with Jesus.

Small Groups (SGs): Mixed gendered groups that meet all year (when they can) and work through teaching and accountability together, focusing primarily on building community.

1x1: We will walk with some people in a direct discipleship relationship for a season, especially if they have specific needs that don't make sense for a group setting.

Equipping Classes: These classes are more academic and are designed to be an addition for everyone in their discipleship journey in the Westmark Family. From entry level to advanced, these classes are written for our church and taught in our church, primarily on Wednesday Nights and Sunday Mornings. They teach through the Bible, theology, and Christian living.

Which Discipleship Relationship seems to be the best fit for you? _____

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/// SECTION 3: EQUIPPING YOU FOR YOUR NEXT FAITH STEP:

BAPTISM & TESTIMONY

/// BEFORE YOU MEET TOGETHER

Take time to read this short explanation of baptism. Be sure to take note of things you don't understand and questions you have. Discuss those at your next meeting together.

If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and haven't been baptized, you should do so. While baptism doesn't save a person, it serves to publicly identify you with Jesus and it's a way to honor the triune God as you are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Sadly, rigid institutionalism, empty religious tradition, controversy and confusion have often characterized far too many Christian traditions when it comes to the sacraments of the church. That said, reacting against these by neglecting something good that Jesus intends for us to practice is not the answer either. Here is the 'why' and 'what' of baptism:

WHY BAPTISM?

We practice water baptism because it's part of Jesus' lasting commission to us. This commission is recorded at the end of Matthew. It says,

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" — Matthew 28:18-20

The central command in this passage is "make disciples of all nations." There are three phrases connected to this command to make disciples: going, baptizing, teaching. We go to people among the

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nations to proclaim the gospel. The words translated by all nations is much closer to the idea of all ethnic groups rather than countries with governments as we might think of. The commission also involves baptizing disciples of Jesus and teaching them obedience to his commands. This commission and these practices were not limited to just the original apostles and the first century church. Jesus expects ongoing faithfulness to his commission until he returns in glory. He makes this clear because he promised his presence to be with us “until the end of the age” as we continue to carry out his commission and these practices.

Here are just a few biblical examples of new disciples being baptized and relationally connecting with the church:

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’...So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” — Acts 2:38-42

“And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house...and he was baptized at once, he and all his family” — Acts 16:31-32

“Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized” — Acts 18:8

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WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is a being immersed in water and brought back up in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in order to declare your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the initiation of your Christian walk in obedience to His commands.

Scripture teaches that water baptism is a visual portrayal of being personally united with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism publicly pictures one's initiation into Christ by faith. Each individual is then to be received by the church community who is in covenant with Jesus, their Lord and Savior. When someone is baptized, it is a public profession of being forgiven, dead to the old life under sin, and alive to life with God by the Spirit through Jesus (Romans 6:1-11; Acts 2:38). It is announcing a relationship with the living God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20).

We can learn from Scripture and follow the Spirit while practicing water baptism with heart and meaning so that it portrays the good news of grace. Preaching makes the gospel audible and the sacraments (baptism and communion) make it visible. God uses both! Water baptism can be experienced with joy in loving obedience to Jesus in alignment to his word.

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BEFORE YOUR BAPTISM

Take time personally to read from Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:29-47; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Romans 6:1-11. Remember:

- You are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
- You are not saved by your own good works or ceremonies, including water baptism
- You will be personally and publicly identifying with Jesus in baptism as an outward sign of the inward reality of your faith in him alone for salvation
- You have been made alive to God in Christ by the Holy Spirit
- You will be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (i.e. one God in three persons)

REFLECT

Why are you interested in being baptized?

How did you come to know Jesus?

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///WHEN YOU MEET TOGETHER

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

To start your time together share your answers to the above questions of ‘Why are you interested in being baptized?’ and ‘How did you come to know Jesus?’

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is a being immersed in water and brought back up in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in order to declare your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the initiation of your Christian walk in obedience to His commands.

As we consider the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of baptism, here are some main categories of what it is and what it isn’t.

Baptism is commanded by Jesus for his disciples.

After Jesus came back to life, appeared to the disciples, he ascended back to heaven. We have the final moments captured at the end of the book of Matthew.

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” — Matthew 28:16-20

There is a lot of great things in this passage, but specifically in the conversation here we see that Jesus commands us to be baptized. He defines discipleship as baptizing and teaching

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people to obey him. It might be simple, but it is very powerful: Jesus commands us to be baptized in order to walk as his disciple.

Baptism is the mark of the commitment you are making to Christ.

The book of Romans is a great explanation of what the gospel is, how it saves us, and its implications for our lives. In Romans chapter 6 the Apostle Paul is making an argument about the real-life change that we have, how understanding God's grace doesn't make us want to sin more—it actually draws us into a life of obedience.

"...We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." — Romans 6:2a-4

Paul points back to the baptism of the Christian as a reminder of the commitment we made and the connection we have. As Christians the death of Jesus is applied to us and the life of Jesus is opened up to us. Baptism is an outward mark of this commitment that we made to Jesus and of reality of how he was substituted for us. The death he died is pictured in our descent into the water, the new life that makes available to us is pictured in our emerging from the waters. When we get baptized, we are proudly wearing the mark that identifies us with the commitment we make to follow him and the commitment he made to us.

Baptism is the mark of your identity in the Church (Big C).

Colossians was written to show the church that Christ is supreme over all creation, sufficient for all salvation, and central to the whole Christian life. Therefore believers must not be pulled away from him by man-made religion, ethnic boundary markers, or spiritual substitutes. In the Old Testament, the people of God had the symbolic marking of the men by circumcision; this set them apart as God's people. But Paul explains that the old covenant sign of circumcision

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has found its fulfillment in Christ, and that baptism now marks out those who have been united to him in his death, burial, and resurrection.

“In [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” – Colossians 2:11-12

Baptism marks us as those people who follow God. It’s like a uniform that designates a team: baptism shows we are team Jesus!

Baptism is the mark of your identity in the church (little c, Westmark).

This is less biblical and more just logical: when you stand up and get baptized to follow Jesus at Westmark Church, you’re going to be identified with the Westmark Family—which is great! God has put us at a certain place and time to influence those around us and we want to be bold and intentional in connecting with those people. We have stories of people posting their baptism social media and that raising questions from others who grew up watching them live wild lives. Those childhood friends came to Westmark to see what this was all about, got plugged in, and eventually gave their lives to Jesus! Baptism is all a part of God’s plan to help reach more people.

Baptism is the declaration of your faith in Christ and a picture of the gospel.

Literally —

When we get baptized, we are announcing our faith in front of people and spiritual forces. This is the flag waving moment where we are claiming ground in the name of the Kingdom of God. It is a reality for the Christian that our primary enemy in life and existence is not in the physical realm, but in the spiritual one.

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“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” – Ephesians 6:12

It’s worth mentioning that waving a flag for Jesus may attract some unwanted negative attention from Jesus’ enemies. It is not uncommon to experience an increase in spiritual attacks that show up as surprising negative situations and struggles. These can often be an attack that is meant to discourage you from following through with your commitment to being baptized.

Symbolically

When we get baptized, we are displaying a picture of Christ’s death and resurrection and our new birth. This is the personal mark of a Jesus follower that we talked about above, but it is also the story of the Gospel. The death and resurrection of Jesus, being told through our actions, with the effect staying on us as we leave—that is a powerful moment to share with anyone who will watch!

Spiritually

When we get baptized, it is a special moment where God works in us in special ways. This idea has the risk of being overstated or understated, depending on your background. Some view baptism as simply a physical moment of getting wet, others will make it hyper-spiritual and attribute spiritual effects to it that aren’t biblically founded. The truth is that whenever we walk in obedience, God will grow us. So, taking this step of obedience means we will experience his grace to grow us—and that might be obvious and fast, it might be more subtle and difficult to see. Either way, we can trust that the miracle of spiritual growth is something that happens when we walk in loving obedience to Jesus.

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Baptism is NOT what saves you.

The good news of salvation is that we aren't earning it at all.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." — Ephesians 2:8-9

So, as we walk in baptism, we are not earning the salvation or jumpstarting it in our hearts. The Bible shows us that Jesus came to bring life to dead people—and we can't make ourselves alive. Our baptism is showing Jesus that we are walking in obedience AFTER we have become Christians and received his Spirit of life.

Baptism is NOT what keeps you saved.

Jesus' death is good enough to pay for our sin and his resurrection is good enough to give us new life. We are secure in him.

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." We don't need baptism to be what secures us in Jesus' hand. Once the Spirit of God comes into our heart and brings us to life, we will never lose the eternal life that he gives us.' — John 10:27-28

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." — Romans 8:38-39

Nothing will pull us away from him, even being unbaptized.

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Baptism is NOT necessary to be a child of God.

Some people fear that the love of Jesus, the work of Jesus, the promise of Jesus just isn't quite enough. They might approach baptism with the hope that doing this one more thing will truly make them belong to the Family of God.

The gospel of John tells us about Jesus and what it means to be accepted by him.

"The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" — John 1:9-12

Being baptized is an important step of obedience, but it doesn't make you any more acceptable to God. We walk in obedience because that is who he has made us into: faithful followers. We don't take steps of obedience to earn the right to be accepted—he gave us that right already by grace, through faith.

Baptism is NOT a re-baptism.

The child of God is instructed to be baptized as a sign of their belief. If they had a false profession of faith and were baptized then, if they were baptized before they could profess their faith, or if they were baptized underneath some other gospel then what they experienced is not defined as a biblical, Christian baptism.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." — Ephesians 4:4-5

Anything outside of the "one baptism" is just getting wet.

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ANALOGY FOR BAPTISM AND MOTIVATION

Imagine a man and woman got married. They were very simple people, not lavish or complicated. The wife especially didn't want a lot of fancy gifts or expensive trips from her husband. The one thing she asked for was that the husband wear his wedding ring. When he wore the ring, it made her feel like he loved her, he was committed to her, and he was willing to display those things to the world.

We know how wedding rings work—you don't have to be wearing one to be married, taking one off doesn't change your marital status. But if the husband was too embarrassed or too stubborn to do the primary thing that his wife asked him to do to display his love to her, it might stir up some questions (and maybe it would lead to some change in marital status!). Why would he be hesitant to represent their relationship to the world? What does his lack of follow through communicate?

The connection to baptism is pretty clear. Jesus asked us to display our love and commitment to him in simple, clear way. If someone is not baptized, that doesn't mean they are not a Christian. But the refusal to follow Jesus in obedience does raise some important questions: Why would we avoid representing Jesus? Why would we disobey? What does it say about our priorities?

BAPTISM INITIATES, COMMUNION RECOMMITTS

The life of a disciple of Jesus starts when the Spirit of God brings repentance for our sins. We turn away from sin and look toward Jesus. That's what it means to understand and accept and understand the gospel. You are now on a new trajectory for your life. Being baptized is a great and important step, followed by continuing to learn who God is through his word and through practicing rhythms of grace.

There will be times where you fall down and scrape your knee. There will be season that are darker than others, and things you fail at. That's why Jesus gave the church Communion, or the Lord's Supper. It's also called The Eucharist, which means "thanksgiving." Even though we fail to keep up our

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commitments to Jesus, he never fails to keep his commitments to us. Baptism is what initiated our walk as a follower of Jesus and communion is what will help us maintain it.

When we fail and fall, we use communion as a reminder and tool to facilitate our confession of sin and the receiving of forgiveness to then live in. We are baptized once to commit our lives publicly to following Jesus and then we come to the Lord's table together often to recommit walking with him.

BAPTISM DAY

Here are a few logistics to understand as we approach the big day!

Please make sure you have the following required items:

- Your testimony approved by an Elder or Pastor prior to the day
- Your testimony written out (no winging it)
- Westmark Church baptism shirt
- Towel
- Pair of dark shorts
- Change of clothes
- List of who you will invite and pray for

This is a great time to show your faith to your family, friends, and neighbors. Think about who you could invite to hear you speak, hear the gospel preached, and watch you take your next step of faith. Many people are more likely to accept an invitation to your baptism than a normal Sunday invitation. That's one of the reasons we want to help you write your testimony; this is a very unique opportunity! We know that doing a good job will honor Jesus and speak a clear message into the lives of people you love about the saving grace of Jesus. We anticipate nonbelievers and will most likely be preaching a gospel message that should relate to where they are at. So, make the list, pray for them, and then make the ask.

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THE ORDER

On the morning of there will be a time to run through order and timing. After the sermon there will be a short explanation of baptism and then those being baptized will come up one at a time, read their testimony, enter the tank, and be baptized. Usually, the gathering will conclude with a song and then families like to get pictures at the front of the sanctuary.

REFLECT TOGETHER

- Do you feel like you understand the purpose and role of baptism?
- Do you have any reason to not be baptized?
- Would you like to be put on the baptism list for our upcoming baptism?
- Do you have anyone outside the Elders or Pastors that you would like to baptize you?
 - This person must be a member in good standing with a solid church
 - Note: It's difficult to have more than 3 people in the tank

TESTIMONY

Telling your story is a great way to remember God's grace in your life. It's also an effective way to be his witness to others. At Westmark Church we have people share their testimony before they get baptized as a way to shine the light on Jesus, point to his work in us, and give him the glory for bringing us new life. Some people can be nervous about sharing, but it often helps to realize that the we are not the focus of our story; the hero of the story is Jesus!

PREPARE YOUR STORY

Prepare to tell your personal story by using the simple outline: Beginnings, Obstacles, Hope, and Future. Write in the space below or use a separate document to prepare to tell your story. Be brief. There is much that could be said, but plan to tell your story verbally in about 5-10 minutes. End this written preparation by considering whether Jesus is the Hero of your story. If not, do some editing to ensure you turn the spotlight on him. In preparing, write out the entire story you will tell verbally.

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Beginnings

Every story has a beginning, including yours. Your birthplace. Your family members. Childhood home and places lived. Friends growing up. Choose a favorite memory or key aspect of your story to share that would help people understand you as a person. Where did you begin?

Obstacles

Despite our stories being exclusively our own, all stories include obstacles. You have had to face difficulties or disappointments. You may have regrets or something about yourself you came to realize. Choose a notable obstacle and describe this. These can be hard to share sometimes, but don't worry about that right now; just write freely and see how God brought you to a place where you were willing to listen to him. When did life get too hard to be doing it alone?

Change

There is a time in the rescue when God opens our eyes to the brokenness of our lives and turns us around toward him. What was it like when you turned around? Was it something about the bitterness of sin that turned you away from pursuing the darkness (repentance)? Do you remember the sweetness of turning toward Jesus and resting in his kindness (faith)? Describe the change in your heart and life that took place.

Hope

Consider ways that hope has made its way into your life story. Where can you look back and see how God was preparing you? When did you begin to truly see the hope that we have in Jesus? Was it a certain person who pointed you in the right direction or an event that changed your outlook on life? Choose a key aspect of your life to share that brought you to realize that you have hope because of the gospel. Describe how this has shaped you.

Future

Though we live in the present, we can imagine the future. Looking forward to walking with Jesus, what are some of the things that you are excited about? How will your future be different now that you are making disciples, pursuing Jesus, and bringing light into the world?

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Is Jesus the Hero of your story?

As you reflect on your story, do you genuinely believe that Jesus is the Hero of your story? Does this come through as you've written it? Do you see any needed changes or edits as you prepare to tell your story so that Jesus is acknowledged as the Hero? How can you genuinely turn the spotlight on him? (HINT: One way to do this clearly and succinctly is to end your testimony with a verse that explains what Jesus has done, what God is doing, or that he gets all the glory!)

REFLECT

Prepare your story by using Beginnings, Obstacles, Change, Hope, Future ... is Jesus the hero?

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/// SECTION 4: EQUIPPING YOU FOR YOUR NEXT FAITH STEP:

MEMBERSHIP

/// BEFORE YOU MEET TOGETHER

Biblically we see pattern of membership arise as the church grew and became more structured, which was mostly centered around baptism. Historically, membership changed over time. It grew from a relational reality that began with baptism and was necessary for discipleship in the Early Church (100 AD–500 AD), and it became a political and economic status by the dark ages (500 AD-1500 AD). From then it has been enshrined as all-important in some traditions, and has been neglected and made hollow by others. So, depending on your background, you may have some strong emotions or no thoughts at all about Church membership.

Membership at Westmark Church is a humble relationship of equal loyalty, responsibility, and accountability between the church body, under the leadership of the Elders, with Christ as our head. This is an important function in our church for practical administration as well as discipleship.

Church membership is the Bible's way of giving visible shape to the organization that makes up the Church. When people trusted Christ in the New Testament, they were baptized and "added to their number" (Acts 2:41), devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). Christians are not saved into isolation but into a body, family, flock, and household of God (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 2:19; 1 Pet. 5:2). Membership simply clarifies who has publicly identified with Christ and who is committing to live under the care, teaching, discipline, and fellowship of a particular local church.

That's why, for over a thousand years, membership and baptism were always so closely related. For the Early Church the idea of an unbaptized member would be ridiculous—in fact, an unbaptized Christian wouldn't make any sense to them. For a very long time the commands of repent, believe the

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gospel, and be baptized were not different: they are all one fluid motion of reorienting your life to follow Jesus.

When the gospel was being preached in the first century most of the audience would have some biblical background. When Jesus called himself “the Christ” or someone referred to him as “the Messiah” or “the Son of David” or “the Son of Man”, many of the listeners would understand what was being claimed. All the Old Testament prophecy and theology was reaching its pinnacle in this God-Man. However, the gospel kept spreading. People who didn’t know Abraham or David or YHWH started to hear about Jesus. So, the Early Church was faced with the question: if someone believed in Jesus coming to die for their sins, how can we know that they truly understand the gospel and all its implications since they don’t know the whole story? To fix that, they invented catechesis— which in the Greek means “to echo the teaching.”

Thus emerged a pattern of discipleship:

- People would hear the gospel and respond in faith
- They would enter a system of teaching and discipleship to ensure they understood what it truly means to follow Jesus
- Once the church had confirmed their knowledge and walk with Jesus (where we get the term “confirmation”) this section would conclude with baptism, marking their identity as a follower of Jesus and as a member of his church—in this way, baptism WAS membership in the local church for many centuries
- After this, the disciple was welcomed to participate in their first communion with the people of God

We have moved away from this pattern slightly, but hopefully you can see the logic and wisdom behind structuring someone’s involvement and discipleship this way. As time went on and we came to the era we live in, the administrative needs of membership (non-profit status, incorporations, voting,

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legal stipulations) demand that we uphold certain political functions and records. So, that has become a reality of intentional upkeep for membership too.

Some argue that membership is not stated in the Bible, which is somewhat true. There is no membership process and you won't find the word for church membership in there. However, the functional of membership is extremely clear and many commands we would not manage to do well without a formal design for membership in the church. This especially clear in the commands given to churches and leaders. Pastors are told to shepherd "God's flock that is under your care" and will give an account for those they lead (1 Pet. 5:2; Heb. 13:17), which assumes they know who belongs to that flock. The church is commanded to practice discipline, when necessary, even distinguishing between those "inside" and "outside" the church (Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:12–13), which assumes a recognizable membership.

So, church membership does not save anyone, but it does publicly affirm a person's profession of faith and commit both the church and the Christian to the biblical pattern of shepherding, accountability, mutual care, and life together in Christ. That's why we define membership at Westmark Church as a humble relationship of equal loyalty, responsibility, and accountability between the church body, under the leadership of the Elders, with Christ as our head.

REFLECT

Please collect all your thoughts, questions, and comments about membership and this process to discuss at your next meeting.

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///WHEN YOU MEET TOGETHER

Membership at Westmark Church is a humble relationship of equal loyalty, responsibility, and accountability between the church body, under the leadership of the Elders, with Christ as our head.

A good analogy for membership in the local church is marriage: it's founded on a deep commitment, shouldn't be broken, and is very painful when it is. That's why we use those words to define the relationship:

- Loyalty: Membership is making a serious commitment to the other members of the church
- Responsibility: We rely on one another in real ways
- Accountability: Challenging each other to growth and being held to godly standards

COMMITMENTS IN THIS RELATIONSHIP

Church membership is a meaningful relationship between a believer and a local church. It is not merely a name on a list, a formality, or a way to gain voting privileges. It is a shared commitment: the church commits to shepherd, care for, teach, protect, and encourage its members, and members commit to worship, serve, pray, grow, and be accountable within the life of the church.

When someone becomes a member, they are saying, "This is the church family where I am committing to follow Jesus with others." And the church is saying, "We recognize your profession of faith, and we are committing to walk with you as a brother or sister in Christ."

These commitments are not meant to be burdensome or legalistic. When done well membership is an incredible blessing, encouragement, and support. It helps us keep the main things the main things so that we grow together in Christ and serve his kingdom faithfully, and to do so with joy and perseverance.

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Commitment 1: We Commit to Worship

Members Practice the Sacraments Together

Members commit to the other members that they will regularly participate in the worshiping life of the church. This includes the regular practice of the sacraments, because baptism and the Lord's Supper are direct commands from Jesus to his church. We take them seriously because Christ gave them to us for the good of his people.

Members Gather Regularly

Members commit to the other members to gather together regularly. No one will be keeping a formal attendance, but we do want to help one another keep the main things the main things. Worshiping together on Sunday mornings is the primary way we fellowship as a church and present ourselves to God together.

God brings us together to make us more like Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. That happens as we sing, pray, hear the Word preached, receive the sacraments, and encourage one another. It also happens through Sunday School, small groups, Bible studies, ministry teams, and other places where we are challenged to grow in knowledge, holiness, love, and obedience.

So, the expectation is not simply, "Come to church because you are supposed to." The expectation is: be present, be teachable, and be intentional about receiving the ordinary means God uses to grow his people—for your good and the good of the rest of the body!

- Why is it so important for you personally to be a part of the regular worship with the body of believers?
- What would happen to the witness of the gospel and the health of the church members didn't value the regular gathering of the saints?

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Commitment 2: We Commit to Serve

Members Serve

The church is not run by a small group of professionals while everyone else watches from a distance. The church is a body, and every member has gifts, responsibilities, and opportunities to contribute.

Some members serve as elders, deacons, ushers, board members, teachers, ministry leaders, or in administrative roles. Others serve quietly behind the scenes. The point is not that every person does the same thing, but that every member sees himself or herself as part of the body, called to use their gifts for the good of others. God provides what the church needs, and often he does that by providing people. You are one of God's good provisions to this church.

This includes taking our responsibilities seriously when it comes to church decisions, voting, and reviewing matters that affect the health and direction of the church. These moments are not about personal preference or getting our way. They are about serving the body, protecting the mission, and seeking the good of others.

Members Give

Serving also includes giving our time, money, and effort. Giving sacrificially to the work of the gospel through the church is a privilege. God has entrusted resources to us so that we can further his kingdom, and gifts to the church, in any form, are both a joy and a responsibility. When we are walking closely with Jesus, we learn that giving back to him is a precious form of worship! We believe that God has been generous to us and that it pleases our Creator when we reflect his generous heart, especially to his own mission in the church.

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Members Love

We also serve by loving one another. That means building relationships with other members, helping raise and disciple the next generation, caring for the hurting, encouraging the weary, reaching into the life of the church, and reaching out to the community.

Membership is not about consuming religious products. It is about serving people. And, wonderfully, that kind of self-giving service often becomes one of the deepest joys of the Christian life.

Commitment 3: We Commit to Pray

Members Pray Regularly, Specifically, and Fervently

The only reason any of us know Christ is because of the grace of God. The only reason lives are transformed, marriages are healed, addictions are broken, truth is received, and holiness grows is because the Spirit of God is at work. We need him. Prayer is not an accessory to the Christian life. It is the active ingredient in our spiritual lives and in our church. We believe prayer changes things, including us.

So, we pray regularly because we always need God's grace. We pray specifically because God works in real people, real situations, real struggles, and real needs. And we pray fervently because we believe prayer really matters.

A praying church is a dependent church. We plan, teach, lead, and serve, but we know that only God gives spiritual life and lasting fruit.

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Commitment 4: We Commit to Accountability

Members Are Accountable to Grow

Members commit to live in accountability with one another. This begins with the basic call to grow as disciples of Jesus. One way we describe that growth is through five traits: Repentant Believers, Jesus Abiders, Sacrificial Sufferers, Kingdom Patriots, and Compassion Drivers.

These traits are not meant to be a rigid checklist. They are a way of helping us encourage growth. We want to be people who repent of sin and believe the gospel, abide in Jesus, suffer faithfully, live as citizens of God's kingdom, and move toward others with compassion. Accountability matters because we believe God changes people. We believe he redeems sinners and does not leave us where we are. Because of that, we need brothers and sisters who will encourage us, challenge us, correct us, and call us back when we drift.

We also need accountability because sin is poisonous and deceptive. Sin blinds us, hardens us, isolates us, and damages others. That is why the Bible calls the church to correct and restore those who are caught in unrepentant sin. This is not because we want to hurt people. It is because God loves his people, and love does not ignore what destroys.

Members are Accountable to Protect the Church

We need to be aware that there will be wolves who come against the church, there are people who just make mistakes and teach false doctrine, and there are some who split the difference. We need to know what we believe and guard the truth entrusted to us. False teaching, shallow doctrine, and theological drift can damage the health of the church and confuse the witness of the gospel.

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Members are Accountable to the Elders & the Elders to the Members

The leadership of the church is accountable to the members to ensure that correct teaching and godly character are what define the ministry. Members are therefore responsible for keeping the leadership accountable and protecting the church.

In the same way, the members are accountable to follow the leadership of the Elders who have been entrusted with guiding and shepherding the church by God and the membership. This commitment means that all will seek healthy, honest, godly communication when concerns arise and submit to biblical principles of restoration.

Members are Accountable to Restore Brothers and Sisters Who Repent

When someone within the church is living in unrepentant and unchallenged sin, the church will seek to correct that person in love with the goal of restoration. Jesus gives this pattern in Matthew 18:15–18.

- The process begins by approaching the person privately
- If the issue remains unresolved, two or three Elders or mature members may become involved
- If there is still no repentance, the Elders may remove that individual from the rights and responsibilities of a member in good standing
- If needed, further steps may be taken to limit that person's involvement with the church for a defined time

The timeline for this process can vary. In some cases, it may happen within a few minutes. Other times, months. In others, it may take many months or even a year.

Whenever we see sin in a brother or sisters' life and call them to repent, we are exercising this restoration process. Every situation is different, and grace abounds. But grace does not mean ignoring sin. We are called to holiness, and our desire is always repentance, healing, and restoration.

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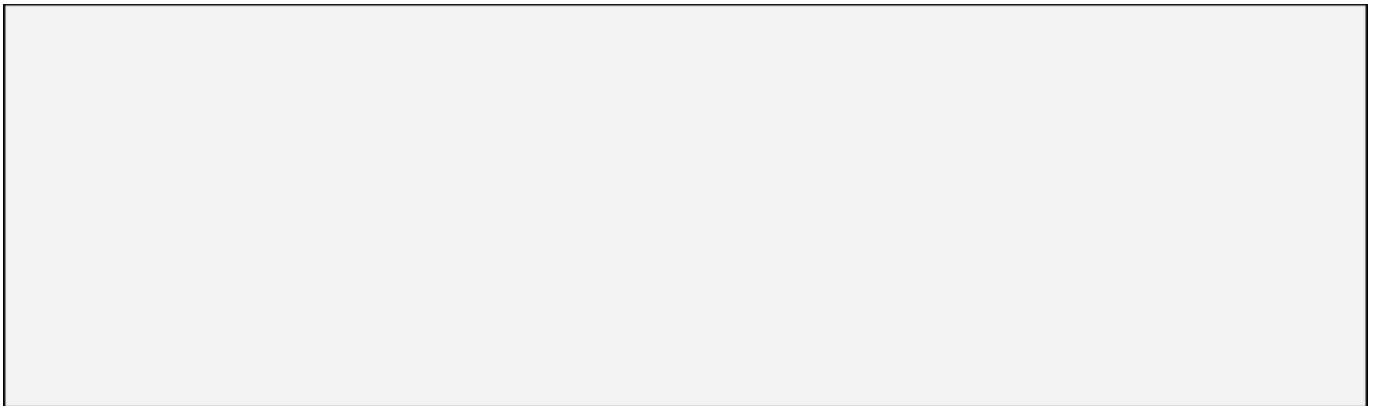
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REFLECT

Which of these 4 Commitments have you seen neglected in relationships before? What happened?



Which of these 4 Commitments seem hardest to commit to?



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THE HEART BEHIND THE COMMITMENTS

All of these commitments—To Worship, To Serve, To Pray, and To Be Accountable—are rooted in the same conviction: Jesus loves his church, and he calls his people to belong to one another in meaningful ways.

We are not asking members to be perfect or to pretend they never struggle. The church is a family of redeemed sinners learning to follow Jesus together. In fact, we are committing to the opposite: let's limp together toward Jesus—and when you need help, I commit to being there; when I need help, I know you've committed to being there.

But because we belong to Christ, we take his church seriously. We want to worship faithfully, serve joyfully, pray dependently, and live accountably. Membership simply clarifies this beautiful relationship: we belong to Christ, and because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another. When done well, membership is one of the greatest pictures of a family growing together.

MEMBERSHIP PROCEDURE

- Take a New Members Class
- Read *The Gospel* by Ortland
 - A short book that describes the gospel message in a helpful way
- Read *I Am A Church Member* by Rainer
 - A short book that describes the correct attitude and perspective to have coming into church membership
- Review, Understand and Commit to the Expectations of Membership and the EFCA Statement of Faith
 - Consider taking the Faith Foundations Equipping Class to walk through the whole statement

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- Read *The EFCA Booklet*
 - This will help you understand the EFCA as a denomination and the various ways our ministry serves in it
- Have an ‘Elder Interview’
 - This is a chance for an Elder in the church to hear a little bit of your story, hear what Jesus means to you, and for you to ask any more questions. The goal is to make sure that everyone coming into our fellowship is really known and understands who Westmark is. Membership is an amazing joy, but it’s also a serious commitment to one another!
- Names of Membership Applicants Posted
 - For two weeks, we will post the names of applicants and then affirm the following Sunday. Posting names allows for all of the congregation to interact with you and the Elders about your membership in the church.

REFLECT

Do you have any questions or comments about the membership process or membership in total?

Once you have read the books, booklet, and Statement of Faith, get back in touch with the office and we will schedule your Elder interview.

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/// SECTION 5: EQUIPPING YOU FOR YOUR NEXT FAITH STEP:

RESOURCES FOR GOING DEEPER

For those who want to deepen their understanding, additional free resources are recommended in this Appendix related to topics covered in this Guide. May you thrive in your daily walk with King Jesus as you center on him and the gospel of grace!

GOSPEL CENTRALITY

The Centrality of the Gospel, Tim Keller

THE GOSPEL STORY

The Story-Line of the Bible, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen

The Plan, Colin Smith

Christ's Redemption, Sandy Willson

THE CREED AND CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

The Apostles' Creed, III Millennium

Confessional Statement, The Gospel Coalition

Cape Town Confession of Faith (Part I-10 Loves), Lausanne Movement

THE CHURCH

The Church: God's New People, Timothy Savage

Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Thabit Anyabwile and Ligon Duncan

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GETTING STARTED

What Does it Mean to Follow Jesus, Tim Wiebe

How Can I Grow as a Follower of Jesus, Tim Wiebe

The Gospel, Ray Ortlund

Gentle and Lowly, Dane Ortlund

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

God's Big Picture, Vaughan Roberts

Apostles Creed, Albert Mohler

Christian Beliefs, Wayne Grudem

UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP

Don't Waste Your Life, John Piper

Prayer, John Onwuchekwa

Multiply, Francis Chan

Radical, David Platt

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