



The Journey

2020

GRACE
80
YEARS

COMMITTED TO OUR HISTORICAL VALUES
AND EXPANDING INTO THE FUTURE





From our President

WHEN I SEE THE MANY ARTICLES THAT MAKE UP *THE JOURNEY* COME TOGETHER, I am always amazed by how wonderfully God is working at Grace Christian University! I am equally impressed by the really sharp faculty and staff with whom I am blessed to serve, as well as the terrific students at our institution.

Last fall, we had some guests from out of town come to speak about leadership to our students. One of these guests was a high profile leader at a high profile organization you would instantly recognize. Two years ago, he was on campus to speak to students and did such a great job we were excited to have him return. This time, he came with a group of people from the local organization and from corporate headquarters. He did a great job, but he was also eager to share with me and the other leaders on campus that he

was impressed with our institution and could sense the excitement and positive culture here. He later told me he felt honored to be a part of something as exciting as what God was doing here and that I should be very proud and happy to serve. Yes, I am! Thank you for reminding me!

Our ministry exists to “*graduate godly individuals prepared to serve Christ in church and society.*” This is our mission, and we do it through biblical higher education. In the pages of *The Journey* you will read articles about students, staff, professors, athletics, and much more. Over one hundred people have chosen to serve Christ here at Grace Christian University and have expressed a calling to use their unique gifts, talents, and energies to advance our mission here on campus and wherever our over six hundred online students live. Some do this overseas in study abroad

classes and ministry experiences. **All of this is built on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His death, burial and resurrection** (1 Corinthians 15:2-6). This display of grace for all mankind is deeply rooted in the unique revelation of Paul’s mystery of the Church the Body of Christ—God’s instrument in the world today (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Read and enjoy. Give praise to our Lord for what He has done and is doing. Thank you for opening these pages and being a “co-worker with Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Ken Bruce Kemper, PhD

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Grace Stories

As students begin to experience life on their own after high school and away from their parents it can be challenging to find a place of belonging and true acceptance. Grace Christian University is a unique campus because of the intentionality of staff and faculty to connect with students where they are and as such a unique close-knit community quickly forms. When talking with current and former students, constant reiteration and recognition is the obvious reality of the many authentic and quality relationships that grow and flourish on our campus. Grace is a great place for young adults to get their feet wet in the adult world while still having the assurance that there is constant support waiting for them on campus.

Finding a Belonging through the Semester Abroad Program

NATALIE MERCER

I HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY BLESSED

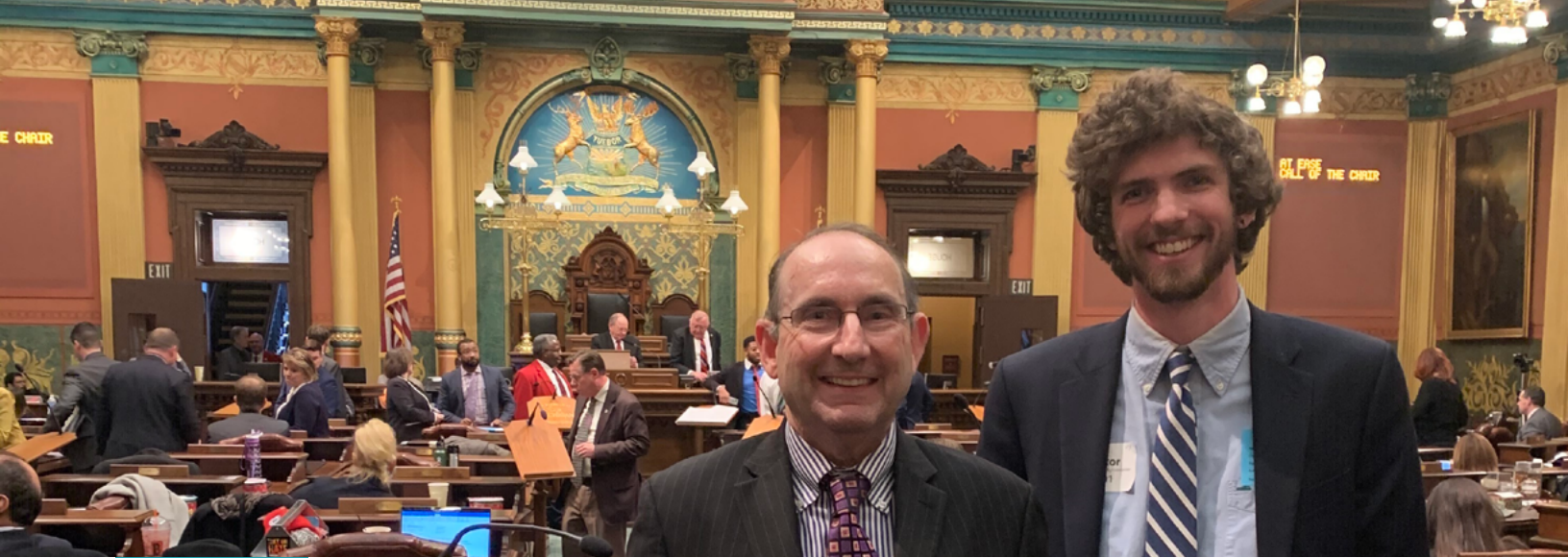
to be able to participate in numerous short-term study abroad trips including spending two weeks in both Ireland and Israel. Both of these trips I took for class

credit and was able to continue working toward my degree while experiencing the unique history and culture of these places with a team of students and staff. After visiting Belize on our Spring Break trip in 2019 I knew immediately that I was meant to return to the country for a longer period of time but was unsure of what it meant to be away from my familiar setting of the Grace campus and the stability and normality my regular daily schedule offered. Making the decision to study abroad for a semester was easy for me because my heart already belonged in long term ministry and I love the thrill of the unknown experiences that come with travel.

Living in a foreign country for four months brought a unique set of challenges that I had never faced before. There was an obvious and immediate culture shock between the Western worldview that I inherited and the more simplistic nature and outlook of Belize. I learned the difference between the necessities of life and the comforts of the modern world. As Americans, we often take some things for granted without putting any additional thought or consideration into them simply because we've never had to make some of the choices that Belizeans think about on a daily basis. I spent time reevaluating my life's priorities as

I talked through my future plans and dreams with people I shared experiential similarities with, but who offered unique perspectives on our role as members of the Church and our Christian faith in general.

Doing life together with the greater body of Christ opened my eyes to the reality of God's sovereignty and how He uses people from different walks of life to love and serve the world. My perspective of ministry changed from activities taking place in a church facility or done intentionally by believers to seeing life as our ministry and the power that community, relationships, and accountability has to change lives and build the Body of Christ. Being in Belize allowed me the opportunity to exercise the skills I learned in the classroom as well as expand on the concepts of faith, love, and service while working with real people in real-time through real relationships. My semester abroad was a time of incredible challenge and growth that was centered on discovering my identity as a child of God and my purpose as His servant, all while loving and being loved on by newfound family and friends.



Student Body President Advocates for the Michigan Tuition Grant

ROBERT KILGO

IN THE MIDST OF STATE BUDGET

CUTS, Grace Christian University Student Body President, Robert Kilgo urged lawmakers to bring back the Michigan Tuition Grant even though as an out of state student, he was not eligible for the grant.

The Michigan Tuition Grant program is available to undergraduate Michigan residents with financial need who plan to attend or are attending independent, degree-granting Michigan postsecondary institutions. Awards pay up to \$2,400 per year. It is estimated that nearly 17,000 students across the state benefit from this grant every year.

People across the state waited with bated breath when the Michigan Tuition Grant was removed affecting several public and private university students across the state who rely on the grant to help pay for college. Kilgo understood

the gravity of the loss of the funding to his fellow classmates and decided to take action by writing a personal letter to his state representative.

What ensued speaks to the character of state representative, Tommy Brann, who called Robert directly and shared his desire to see the grant reinstated. From that point on, Robert and representative Brann formed a unique friendship that included several calls from Brann updating Robert on the progress of the legislation, and a personal invite for Robert to spend a day with Brann at the capital and on the House of Representatives floor.

On Tuesday, December 3, Brann called Robert immediately after the bill had passed and the grant reinstated, letting him know personally that the governor planned to sign the bill. "Robert met with me on the veto of the tuition grants and the stress it was putting on students," said Representative Brann. "Robert did not give up and it is a positive lesson in participating. Good job Robert and Grace Christian University." Kilgo says the experience made him appreciate the leaders around him as well as the friendship he was able to develop with State Representative Brann.

Kilgo is currently a Senior at Grace Christian University pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Human Services with a concentration in Criminal Justice. He aspires to go into politics and pursue his Masters in Organizational Leadership at Grace.



Want more stories like this?

In 2019, Grace launched Merit Pages to get student, alumni and faculty stories out to the world.

Learn more at

[GRACECHRISTIAN.MERITPAGES.COM](https://www.gracechristian.edu/meritpages)



Expanding Grace Update

KEN BRUCE KEMPER, PhD



THIS HAS BEEN AN EXCITING YEAR FOR GRACE! Last April we launched the largest capital campaign in the history of our institution at a very special event in downtown Grand Rapids with special guest Kirk Cousins. At the event, we announced that the campaign gifts and pledges had reached 67% of our goal. (*We are at the 33 yard line and seeking to cross the goal line.*)

I am extremely grateful to the Board of Directors of the University who have responded with courage and vision for the future of our institution. They voted to move forward with a \$4 million capital campaign, pledging their participation and prayerfully seeking God to multiply that again and again as others joined them. I can say enthusiastically that 100% of our Board Members have pledged and given toward the capital campaign, and 100% of the Administration and Deans of the University have also committed to moving the University forward.



Student Housing



Kitchen & Dining Hall



Technology



Scholarships

I continue to be amazed and blessed to see Christian men and women who have never been financial partners in the past pledge their support and give to this exciting capital campaign

This gives strong affirmation to our goals and confirms that the Holy Spirit is at work in planning and carrying out the plans for expanding the ministry of Grace Christian University.

In my associations with many other Bible colleges and Christian universities, I continually hear about difficult cutbacks and layoffs due to decreasing enrollment and societal pressures. I cannot help but praise God for the continual and ongoing growth Grace has experienced! Over the period of ten years (since 2010) we have had more students take classes at Grace each and every year than the previous year! God is at work. We must give all the credit and the glory to the Lord! We work very hard to be excellent at serving Him and being true to our mission of “*graduating godly individuals prepared to serve Christ in church and society.*” We know that without God’s favor, we would not be expanding.

Our Expanding Grace Capital Campaign is not a gimmick to attract more students. Rather, it is an obedient response to God’s blessings and desire for us to reach more students in this increasingly anti-Christian society. Never has there been more division and

criticism in our nation, but the truth of the Gospel and the need for ministers of the grace of God is a godly response which stands in stark contrast to the useless rhetoric. The Bible is true, and the serious study of God’s Word leads to life transformation and preparation for service to a world in desperate need of both the message and example of that truthful message. This new generation needs to be disciplined by interactions and relationships - more than what can be achieved in sporadic church attendance - and our campus community intentionally seeks to do exactly that.

The incredible upgrades and expansion to our kitchen, dining room, and serving areas have been completed, and allow us to serve students so much more effectively. Our students appreciate it, and the new meeting room (*President’s Dining Room*) has been steadily used for luncheons and other meetings, demonstrating the critical need for such a space.

We have awarded over \$800,000 in scholarships to-date from the Capital Campaign which is currently in the second year of its three year duration. We have also invested in technology upgrades which surpassed the original \$80,000 designated for that purpose. As we closed out 2019, we progressed to include \$1 million above the April figure and had only \$300,000 left to reach the \$4 million. (*Putting us inside the 10 yard line, and pressing to cross the goal line!*)

The remaining funds for the Capital Campaign will support more scholarships and allow us to begin to build new student residences. Please pray with us for God’s supply of these needed capital gifts and pledges to finish this important phase of Expanding

Grace. As we seek to finish the last year of the campaign, we are making plans to break ground on the student residences as soon as funds become available. These new facilities will take nine months to a year to construct and be ready for occupancy. They will add more than eighty new rooms to our campus, replacing four older homes which can only house a dozen students or less. These will easily be the most attractive housing on campus allowing us to begin systematically remodeling and upgrading existing housing which is all fifty years old or older. For students to desire the community we offer, the dining and sleeping facilities must be more acceptable. This capital campaign accomplishes a great deal of progress toward this desire.

God is pleased with obedience which is exercised in courageous acts of faith. I am always amazed at how God simply seeks His children to move forward in faith so He can show Himself good and more than able. The Expanding Grace Capital Campaign is growing my faith in the Great God we serve. As a reader of *The Journey*, you are a partner we need to join with us to make this capital campaign a success. It is both the small and the large donations which are given that make this campaign successful. Please exercise your faith and partner in the great work God is doing to impact a new generation for Christ! We need you, and God desires your heart.

**Find out more
& partner with us**

**[GRACECHRISTIAN.EDU/
EXPANDING-GRACE](https://gracechristian.edu/expanding-grace)**

Leaving a Legacy

A LASTING LEGACY REMAINS WHEN YOU HONOR A LOVED ONE OR FRIEND WITH A MEMORIAL GIFT. Your gift to Grace Christian University becomes a living tribute to their memory, and it will powerfully impact the next generation as they are learning how to transform their world for Jesus Christ. We praise God for the lasting legacy provided by these donors during 2019:

Raymond Adams

Amy Martin

Henry Bouma, Jr.

Theodore & Jane McIntyre

Janet Karshina Davis

Dan & Beverly Davis

Frank & Joan Edwards

Dave & April Edwards

Jean Foulkes

Barbara Carlisle
Thomas Foulkes
Dan & Barb Furbush
Ken & Kathy Kemper
Patrick & Norma LaMotte
Owen & Nancee Smith
Rebecca Szeffc

JR Jensen

Jodie Jensen

Clarence E Kramer

Milly Kramer

Barbara Kroll

Amy Martin

Diana Lee Hicks-Noller

William Noller

Charles Peterson

Barbara Skinner

George W. Reihmer

Isabel Reihmer
Ted & Renee Reihmer

Coralee Spooner

Betty Barber
Paula Lenger
WJ & Ruth Mahony
Linda K Siler
Duane & Jo Ann Terpstra

Alfred & Betty VanDyke

Dan VanDyke
Fredrick VanDyke

James Velting

Phyllis Velting

Richard Velting

Rob & Nyla Velting

William Velting

Gloria Velting

Elizabeth Wahlstrom

Leonard Wahlstrom

Dick Walker

Zach & Olivia Kakabaker
Bryan & Ami Walker

Mary Jean Wolf

Allan Wolf

David R. Zoerb

Susan Carney



**To talk to Advancement
about memorial gifts**

**CALL
(616) 530-7756**



Expanding Grace in the Classroom and Beyond

Pamela Sherstad with a group of students in a communications class

BIGGER IS BETTER! While almost no one thinks that statement is always true, it reflects a common association in people's minds: If I want a better house, I need a bigger house. Better cars have more horsepower. Books on the bestseller list must be the best books. After disappointment with a "better" house, car, or book, many people rethink the bigger is better association. Likewise, simply "Expanding Grace" will not automatically make it better. Grace, however, is not only expanding in size. It is expanding its capability to help students learn. Here are some of the ways Grace is expanding its capacity for teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom.

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMAN SERVICES

Last fall the Research Statistics class discussed an article covering growth

mindset in the classroom. It highlighted the evidence-based research regarding normalizing reasonable mistakes, practicing positive self-talk (versus getting frustrated and giving up), and students' investment in tracking their progress and setting goals for their own learning. The class discussed ways they could apply the research to their life stresses and embrace positive habits for success. The capacity for learning grew as research turned from facts to know into skills to use.

ADULT ONLINE LEARNERS

Improving online students' first experiences in their degree programs through better orientation and foundational classes expands their ability to study and learn throughout their time at Grace. For many adult learners life challenges add an extra element to their educational journey. For online students, the classroom

extends into their personal lives. Academic advisors find themselves transitioning between many roles: guide, coach, teacher, and even friend! They meet students wherever their needs are both in and out of the classroom. Those conversations can range from heavy to light from one moment to the next. Students appreciate their advisors' listening and praying with them as much or more than anything else they do. In the students' words...

"Because you took the time to listen to me, help me get things organized, and prayed for me, I was able to find some solid footing, and as a result, God was able to lead me to help someone else."

"Not long ago, I was experiencing a tough season in my own life... It was to the point that I wanted to give up. I decided to drop out of school. I called my academic advisor... She said that she

CONTINUED >

could hear the hurt in my voice... she started talking empowering words that went down in my Spirit... she asked if she could pray with me. When I got off the telephone with her, I felt so much better. Through my advisor, God changed my mentality and turned my life around. Presently I'm back in school, and near accepting my bachelor's degree."

"When I received your thoughtful and heartfelt prayer card it brought tears to my eyes. It couldn't have come a better time! I appreciate being a part of a community that's concerned about education and ministry."

Students' capacity for learning expands when they know the University cares and connects God's grace with the students' needs!

MUSIC, WORSHIP & TECHNOLOGY

This semester, the School of Music, Worship and Technology welcomed new staff and faculty: Chapel Worship Coordinator Leo Caldas, piano instructor Lonnie Ostrander, music theory instructor Rena Poling, and accompanist Cynthia Haas. God also blessed Grace during the fall semester with generous donors who have given to improve teaching and learning spaces. Churches and organizations regularly seek Grace students to serve in internships, ministries, and career-launching opportunities! Great instructors, improved learning tools, and real-world experience expand the effectiveness of teaching and learning at Grace.

ARTS & SCIENCES

The School of Arts and Sciences teaches general education courses from a biblical perspective, expanding the students' integration of faith and

knowledge. Faculty have the pleasure of helping students succeed by providing a solid foundation of courses on which to build their academic pursuits. On the Grace Christian University campus, the faculty know every student in their courses by name. This intimate environment provides students with the attention needed to succeed. Helping students includes developing trust, providing tutoring, expanding the variety of courses offered to keep students academically engaged, and providing practical course content for success outside the classroom.

“The small class sizes at Grace allow the students to get to know and trust us and see that we are real people. We are helping students succeed by relating to them, as unique individuals relating to unique individuals.”

Dr. Tess Stockslager

When students expressed interest in learning Spanish, Provost Kim Pilienci took the steps needed to offer Spanish language courses and help students succeed in learning a new language. In the 2020 spring semester, courses in Dystopian Literature, History of American Foreign Relations, and Popular Culture and Communication were offered for the first time to students. Grace is expanding student learning in diverse fields of knowledge.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT


Grace has also expanded the kinds of academic support available to help students succeed.

“The Grace Experience” is a course taken by all on-campus freshmen to prepare them for success. The course covers responsible borrowing and finance management, healthy habits, handling conflict, biblical cultural intelligence, time management, goal setting, and more. It connects students with Career Services so preparation for landing their first job begins the first semester of their freshman year - not the last semester of their senior year.

The Grace Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) is a student success program under the wing of the Bultema Memorial Library. The ACE employs tutors to help students succeed. These services are available for all three campuses (traditional on-campus, online, and online graduate studies) at no cost to students. The two main facets of the Grace ACE are tutoring, and paper review. Tutoring sessions are live interactions which assist students with class material, coach students to produce excellent papers, or work with students to develop skills like time management and self-motivation.

When a student submits a paper for review, a reviewer checks it for grammar, formatting and style, and questions the writer about the content. Feedback is supplied to the student and additional help is offered if needed. Many students struggle with academic format and citations, but with paper review, students can make necessary corrections, and turn in papers with confidence.

CONTINUED >



Because you took the time to listen to me, help me get things organized, and prayed for me, I was able to find some solid footing, and as a result, God was able to lead me...



“I am so thankful to the ACE program because it helped me a lot in my classes and to communicate better with people and my teacher. I also want to give a thanks to all the people that work for the ACE for everything they do, especially to Ms. Erinn Huebner for helping me on to get more confident in how to write and how to socialize with others.”

Franklin Rodriguez-Arias

Online students can sometimes feel lonely, like they are adrift without a life preserver. Grace ACE allows students to have personal, real-time contact through video conference with someone to bounce ideas off of and provide a little extra support or reassurance. The paper review and writing coaching have helped students expand their ability produce better work, improve their grades and help them acquire the skills and confidence to tackle writing on their own.

Bigger is not always better, but Grace is expanding to be better in its curriculum and academic support for students.





Honoring Dr. Sam

Dr. Sam Vinton as he was presented with President Emeritus status, with his wife, Becky



LAST YEAR, DR. SAM VINTON WAS AWARDED PRESIDENT EMERITUS status by the Board

of Grace Christian University. He was recognized by Board Chairman Dr. Gretchen Johnson at the April Commencement exercises, and was honored along with his wife, Becky, during Homecoming festivities last October.

Dr. Samuel R. Vinton, Jr. was born and raised in Congo, Africa, where his parents, Reverend Samuel and Marie Vinton served seventy-six and fifty-four years, respectively. After Sam graduated from Milwaukee Bible College (now Grace Christian University) in 1955 and was ordained to the ministry by the Grace Gospel Fellowship, he married Rebecca Stringfellow on June 11th. Five months later, they left for the Congo, where they served for twenty-one years. Their son, Bill, who is now a missionary in Malawi, was born in 1956, and their daughter Debbie in 1958. While in the

Congo, his primary ministries included training Congolese pastors, writing textbooks, and heading up the Swahili Bible translation committee. From 1961-1976, Sam was the Field Director for the Congo field.

In 1976, Sam and Becky returned to the USA and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Dr. Sam taught missions and theology at Grace Bible College. While teaching, he was able to earn two masters degrees from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary and a doctorate from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He became Academic Dean for two years, and was later President of the College for five years prior to becoming Executive Director of Grace Ministries International (GMI) in 1990. While he “retired” from his position at GMI in 2012, he continues to teach at Grace Christian University and remains active in ministry on campus and at Rush Creek Bible Church.



Want more stories like this?

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Learn more at

GRACECHRISTIAN.MERITPAGES.COM

Our Men's Basketball team became the NCCAA National Champions in 2019 with a margin of one point in the final!

Cross Country National Champion Kim Buskirk (right) and her coach Gerry Verwey (left)



Our Men's and Women's Soccer teams won their NCCAA Regional Championships Division II



Then... and Now

CORY JAMIESON



ONE OF MY FONDEST MEMORIES as a student-athlete at Grace came in my senior year (2012)

after my final basketball game in a Grace uniform. We had just won the NCAA National Tournament, and before we went out to eat and celebrate we gathered as a team at the hotel, circled up, and prayed together. In a very bittersweet moment, we thanked God for bringing us to Grace and the relationships built along the way. Then we prayed for the future athletes and teams that would come through Grace - that they would experience Christ in a real way. *I love the fact that I get to witness this happening today as the Assistant Athletic Director at Grace Christian University!*

God's hand has been clearly evident in the growth of our University and also in our athletic department. Just a decade ago when I arrived as a student athlete, the Grace Christian University Athletic Department offered six intercollegiate sports: men's and women's basketball and soccer, volleyball, and men's cross country. Now, with *sixteen* sports, Grace has more than doubled the amount of student athletes and teams! Men's and women's cross country, tennis, bowling, as well as outdoor and indoor track

and field, men's baseball (coming 2020) and JV men's basketball are now part of our roster.

EXPANDING WITH PURPOSE

Paul uses a captivating athletics illustration in 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 to talk about purpose:

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air."

Our steadfast goal is to always keep our eye on the (ultimate) prize as we expand opportunities for students to attend Grace and participate in collegiate athletics. If the hearts of our student athletes are not stirred for Jesus Christ and our athletic programs do not aim to glorify God in word and action, no matter how many records we break or banners we hang, the crowns do not last - we run aimlessly - we are like boxers beating the air.

We will continue to strategically look at adding new programs with the purpose of providing an opportunity to recruit student athletes *in* the mission of them going *out* as *godly individuals prepared to serve Christ in church and society.*

HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR US

In an athletics world that needs God's light and truth, please pray that Grace athletics will have an impact. Pray for our current student athletes and those to come, that they will experience a deeper intimacy with Jesus Christ. Pray for discernment for coaches and administrators as they continue to lead and make decisions with God's guidance.

Thank you for your continued support, and Go Tigers!

**Stay up to date on
Grace Athletics**

GRACETIGERS.COM



Advancement News

The Advancement Department exists to partner with God's people to develop and raise resources to fill the mission and vision of the University

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, special events are hosted to involve friends and partners of the University for this purpose. Here are some of the highlights.



THE 2ND ANNUAL MID-WINTER GALA

Nearly 200 guests joined in celebrating Grace's Honored Alumni, outstanding Faculty and Staff members and Athletic Hall of Fame honorees last February. Worship Arts students were able to participate in a guitar clinic with feature artist, Phil Keaggy prior to his concert. Special thanks to our sponsors and guests as we successfully raised over \$30,000 for our student scholarship fund! Praise the Lord!

The February 2020 event featured guest artists Selah.



EXPANDING GRACE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN KICKOFF

This spectacular April 2019 event held at the JW Marriot was the public launch of our three-year Expanding Grace campaign. Special Guest Kirk Cousins (Minnesota Vikings Quarterback) spoke to the crowd of over 250, and an additional \$155,600 toward the campaign was raised that evening.

EXPANDING
GRACE



DEDICATION OF NEW DINING ROOM FACILITY

In 2019, Grace embarked on its largest capital campaign in history! We praise God for His faithfulness and provision enabling us to begin construction last summer on renovating the existing Rec Room, Dining Room, and Kitchen. In addition, a new President's Room was added to the construction, allowing us to expand our impact even more, providing a meeting space for student groups, leadership, our Board, and our ministry partners.

Find out more about upcoming events

**[GRACECHRISTIAN.EDU/](https://gracechristian.edu/events)
EVENTS**

Beyond Lollipops & Rainbows

ERINN HUEBNER

Two students' stories of perseverance through pain, and finding their way to Grace



WHEN YOU THINK OF LOLLIPOPS AND RAINBOWS, you likely recall good memories from your childhood days. While many have happy times associated with their youth, this is not always the case. At Grace Christian University we have students who come from all walks of life, and have overcome the impossible to serve the Lord. Here you will read the stories of Angel Murphy and Rosine Hounakey – two young women who have been used mightily by God as they learn and study at Grace.

Angel Murphy

BEFORE SHE EVEN KNEW SHE WAS EXPECTING, Stephanie Shelton heard a still small voice whisper, "I'm going to send you an angel." She did not understand at the time, but when her daughter arrived, she knew just what to name her. Angel Murphy was her mother's rainbow baby, a successful pregnancy after a complicated pregnancy and loss. From the moment she was conceived, she was covered in prayer, and after she was born, she grew under the teaching of her parents and in God's grace.

November 15, 2018 was a turning point in Angel's life. She had been attending Grand Rapids Community College but took a gap year, which turned into two. She was working, but without a purpose, holding down several part-time jobs. Suddenly, her father, Will Murphy, passed away after a massive heart attack. The world around her shattered into chaos as her very large immediate and extended family fell headfirst into grief. Angel was a daddy's girl, and her family expected her to shatter at any minute. But God's Spirit of Truth held her together and gave her strength, and she found herself planning her father's memorial service, and helping her mother, siblings, aunts, and uncles through their grief process. She grieved; but she was not broken.



She felt a purpose building within her, as though her father had handed her the keys and said, "Now go find the doors and unlock them."

In January of the following year, during her daily prayer time, she felt that God was prompting her to start a women's group. Angel decided to pray about it in earnest, but she didn't know how it would happen. "I don't even know what I'm doing; I'm just really starting to develop this relationship with You. I just lost my father, and I don't even



have a job.” She wasn’t working, so renting a space was not an option. She didn’t know where to begin, but she thought that if God would provide what she needed, she would do this. Then things started to happen seemingly with a force of their own. Her cousin, a minister, helped her walk through what ministering looked like. Her aunt who managed a building provided a free space, and a cousin helped her with logistics and advertising.

Fifteen women, from middle schoolers to middle-aged adults, came to the first meeting. Angel talked about how even though all were in different stages of life and had different goals, all of them really only had the one goal: to move forward. She encouraged the women

by sharing that through the pain and grief - whatever the situation - one does not have to stay stuck because God has a purpose for your pain and a purpose for your life. Every month, more and more women came to hear Truth from a young woman. She realized that she could do so much more with this vision if she pursued an education. She also wanted to play basketball, but again, she did not know how it would happen. Was this realistic? How would she pay for it? Where would she go?

Grace Christian University popped up in her online search. A friend already at Grace asked her to come to open gym, and she met the basketball coach. She wondered what programs were available, and found that the business program would be the perfect fit. The basketball coach was on board and actively recruiting her, and financial aid came through - “just enough to get me in the door.” God had once again opened all the doors to the things she had prayed for in order to confirm that Grace was the place for her. Angel started school in August, and now she is asking God for a new assignment. “There’s something here for me, I just have to figure out what it is.”

Angel plans to use her business degree to start her own company, providing women’s retreats all over the nation (maybe the globe) to help women who are stuck in their pain and grief to find purpose and introduce them to the God who loves them, and the One who saves them.



Rosine Emefa Hounakey

TOGO, WEST AFRICA, 2003.

Thirteen-year-old Rosine Hounakey’s father is sick. Her mother is holding down solid work, but has three children to raise and feed. Rosine’s auntie approaches her mother with an offer: She will take Rosine with her to America, to work, to live the American dream, and to send home money. Rosine’s mother agrees. She would have one less mouth to feed, and money coming in from Rosine’s income.

Her auntie lied. In reality, she was bringing twenty-three girls, including Rosine, between the ages of ten and thirty to the US to work in an elaborate labor trafficking ring which originated in New Jersey. Rosine was one of the first girls in this ring to work in the satellite location of Los Angeles. She worked from 8 am to 2 am in a hair salon. When she was picked up by her cousin, he would take her wages and tips, and verbally abuse her. Rosine had a spunky attitude and a rebellious streak. She began sneaking her tip money into a secret place. She was beaten, and threatened, but she wouldn’t give in. Finally, her auntie had had enough, and brought her

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She entered a kind of “survival mode,” simply working and raising her children, wondering what God wanted her to do with her life

back to Togo, but not before ruining her reputation by spreading lies that she was a prostitute. In Togo, that meant that she would never get a job, and she would never get a husband to support her. She was abandoned and left to fend for herself.

Her mother eventually found her and took her home. Rosine received a call from a man for whom she had played the role of “wife” (i.e. tricking immigration officials so he could get a visa) in one of her auntie’s schemes. He offered to marry her for real and move her back to America. Her mother agreed again, and in 2005 at the age of fifteen, she was given to a thirty-four year old man to be his wife. She had her first child shortly after, and her second only fourteen months later. They moved often in order to keep clear of the law and immigration officials. She lived under the assumed name of Sophie. Eventually, they wound up in Iowa. Meanwhile, the labor ring in New Jersey was broken up by Immigration and Customs

Enforcement, and they found out about Rosine. In 2007, she was located and rescued from Iowa. She was 17.

Rosine was placed in a foster home in Conklin, Michigan, for just one year until she turned 18. Once again, she was left alone to fend for herself and her two young children. She enrolled in and completed high school in two years. She moved to Grand Rapids, and was followed by her “husband,” who continued to stalk her until he lost interest and remarried. She entered a kind of “survival mode,” simply working and raising her children, wondering what God wanted her to do with her life. She started her own business, and became very involved in her local church. In her online college search, she found Grace Christian University which offered online classes for busy single parents like herself. She has already completed her associate’s degree, will graduate with her bachelor’s degree in 2020, and plans to continue, obtaining a graduate degree in the future.

“The worst thing about all of my experiences is not the work, or the ‘marriage,’ it’s people jumping to conclusions and judging you for something they don’t understand. People would see me, young, with young children, and assume I was a ‘bad teen.’ I love the people who get to know me, and hold me accountable but still allow me to be myself.” Rosine credits all of her resilience to the Lord, who allowed her to have faith and know her worth, even in impossible situations. Her mother taught her to be self-sufficient and street smart from a young age. Counseling has helped her recover somewhat from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Her faith, determination, and grit has brought her through. “I don’t want to get lost in my past,” she explains. “It’s been a decade, and God has gifted me with a resilience over and above anything I could have imagined when I was thirteen.”

Expanding Grace in Our Community



EVERY STUDENT AT GRACE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY RECEIVES

an education that prepares them for a lifetime of ministry. It does not matter what a student is studying - everyone is involved in ministry. While the classroom instruction students receive is essential to their growth and preparation, the application of their learning through service in churches, schools, and other organizations gives them an opportunity to follow the example of Jesus Christ while impacting West Michigan. This process starts as soon as they arrive as freshmen on campus, and it continues through graduation and beyond. Our students are continually "expanding grace" as they make a difference in our community!

During student orientation this year over 100 students volunteered around Wyoming and Grand Rapids, serving in several areas including Kent County

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JIM GAMBLE



**Following the example of
Jesus Christ while impacting
West Michigan**

Parks, Vista Springs Assisted Living Community, Attic After School, Urban Family Ministries, Mel Trotter Ministries, and North End Community Ministry. These service projects make an impact around us and help establish a culture of service at Grace. They also give our student body an opportunity to learn more about West Michigan while building relationships with organizations where they can volunteer. Long after these orientation projects end, many students continue to volunteer at places where they served.

Students in theology and Bible classes incorporate Christian ministry service as part of their coursework.

In fall 2019, more than two hundred students served regularly in Wyoming and around West Michigan, representing the University at more than fifty churches and forty other organizations

Additionally, dozens more students participate in ministry through efforts hosted on our campus. On-campus ministry opportunities may involve leading other students in small groups and Bible studies, or traveling to local churches and youth groups to lead worship or teach lessons.

Each Monday night during the school year, several Grace students host local

children on our campus through a partnership with Urban Family Ministries. As these kids visit our campus, they become accustomed to the college environment, and start to see a college education as an attainable goal for themselves. Grace students share a meal with these kids, play games, teach a Bible lesson, and help them with homework.

For years, Grace students have been investing in local schools, as our students have served as mentors through partnerships with One Wyoming 1-on-1 and Affinity Mentoring. Our students have invested one-on-one time with Wyoming students at Godfrey Early Childhood Center, Godfrey Elementary, North Godwin Elementary, West Godwin Elementary, and Godwin Middle School.

A partnership with Fellowship of Christian Athletes has opened the door for Grace students to connect with student athletes in local schools. Several students volunteer time throughout the semester at Wyoming High School, serving meals and speaking at group gatherings. Keoante Blackamore, a senior from Dowagiac, Michigan, who also plays on Grace's varsity basketball team, says, "Grace's partnership with (FCA) helps build a bridge in the community in spreading the Word of God. We can instill truth and confidence in a student athlete's life, so that one day they too will pass it along."

Other students are serving in the community through various organizations like Attic After School, Young Life, Willing to Wait, Habitat for Humanity, Kids Food Basket, the Salvation Army Kroc Center, and Community Kids. Our students will collectively log thousands of hours of

ministry and volunteer service in West Michigan during the semester!

In addition to student volunteers, our staff members volunteer in the community as well. Campus Pastor Rick Pileci currently serves as the chaplain for the Wyoming Police Department. This partnership has grown as staff and students have built connections with officers in the Wyoming Police. It's not unusual to see officers visit our campus for lunches and other meetings. They offer various services to our Criminal Justice students, and one current student is employed in their Cadet program.

Grace has also opened the campus for community engagement events with the local neighborhood and the Wyoming Police and Fire Departments. Each August, the campus hosts a National Night Out event, and we also help run a Boots and Badges community engagement event. This provides our community with a great opportunity to show appreciation for local first responders and law enforcement.

Grace is also building relationships with local businesses. Through community engagement initiatives and business leader meetings, local businesses are learning more about Grace. Each month, more than 25 businesses are represented at meetings at Marge's Donut Den, looking for ways to invest in Wyoming and improve our community. The character of our students and what they can offer the community have been talking points at these meetings. We are grateful for God continuing to expand the ministry opportunities at Grace.



Chairman's Musings

DR. GRETCHEN JOHNSON

Chair, Grace Christian University Board of Directors

LAST FALL A GROUP OF FIVE BOARD MEMBERS had the opportunity to spend a few days learning more about our call to board service. Through a series of lectures, group work, and coaching sessions, this training held by the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) helped us learn what has been entrusted to us as Board Members. We learned how to serve with excellence, and how effective boardsmanship means *engaging in work that we have been called to complete*.

The training encouraged me to think about the “why” of serving on the Grace Board, and also whether board service is truly fulfilling a calling. As a Board, we understand that we are stewards of Grace. That stewardship is important in many areas including:

- Preserving the Grace message and maintaining the biblical foundation of Grace Christian University
- Continuing to graduate godly individuals prepared to serve Christ in church and society
- Focusing on preparing our next generation of Grace pastors (without mountains of educational debt!)
- Integrity and accountability in our actions and decision making
- Excellence in our programs
- Effective use of resources

And... while all of the areas listed above are important—critical even—for the long-term sustainability of Grace,

none of this matters without the saving knowledge of Christ. Romans 10:14 says:

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

I am going to ask you to pause and read this verse again:

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

These questions are at the very heart of what Grace—including students, faculty, administration, alumni, donors, Board Members—is called to answer. *We each have a role.* For students, it means preparing to answer that call in each one’s vocation. For faculty and administration, it involves preparing those students to share the gospel and serve Christ well in church and society. For alumni, it involves actively serving wherever we are. For our donors, it encompasses helping Grace grow, build, and develop further in order to follow God’s leading to reach further. For Board Members, this entails stewarding the call with which we have been entrusted and doing so with excellence.

As we continue to share in this important work, I ask that you think about the influence Grace has had on you. As an alumnus, donor, and Board

Member, I am thankful for Grace and the impact it has had on my life. While I appreciate and value my education at Grace, what I am most grateful for are the students and friends at Grace who played a role in leading my husband to the Lord. I am grateful that studying at Grace led me to a job where I met a dear friend who also was rescued and redeemed by Christ (*she subsequently led every member of her family to the Lord!*). Reflecting on this reminds me of the importance of our work of graduating godly individuals who will go out, serve, and share Christ with the world.

If you are not doing so today, I ask that you prayerfully consider how you can partner with us. Not sure how? Here are some ways:

- Pray for our Board (as we meet regularly in January, April and October) and also for the smaller group that will be continuing ABHE board excellence training
- Pray for students, faculty, and staff
- Give!
- Share your story of how Grace changed your life or the lives of those around you
- Attend events at Grace and bring a friend!

Thank you for partnering with Grace Christian University!

Alumni News



The 2nd Annual Disc Golf Tournament

Homecoming Weekend (October 11-12) kicked off with a packed Baker Chapel filled with alumni, students, faculty, staff, and Grace family



The former His Image band with special guests Kaylee Johnson and Elyse Lenger led us through a powerful praise and worship time

Alumni Athletic Games rounded out the weekend! Alumni Volleyball, Alumni Basketball and Women's Basketball





Soup and Sweet Bake-off Winners
 Left: Amanda Fackler (soup)
 Right: Amy (Lowder) Riemersma (sweet)



Everyone enjoyed the ice cream at our first "Alumni Scoop." Thank you Young Alumni for providing and serving the ice cream!

2019 ALUMNI OF THE YEAR

Honored at the 2019 Mid-Winter Gala



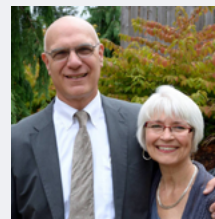
Jerry & Sandi (Spooner) Bomers
 Grace Ministries International
 Missionaries in Paraguay



Linda Siler
 Registrar, Grace Christian University
 Wyoming, Michigan



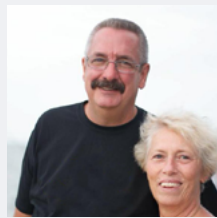
Dale Day
 Grace Board Member
 Owner, Hudsonville Trailer
 Hudsonville, Michigan



Jim & Teresa Shemaria
 Senior Pastor
 Berean Bible Church
 Shoreline, Washington

2020 ALUMNI OF THE YEAR

Honored at the 2020 Mid-Winter Gala



Donald TenHoeve
 Grace Ministries International
 Director of Field Operations
 Wyoming, Michigan



Cameron Townley
 Lead Pastor
 Rush Creek Bible Church
 Byron Center, Michigan

Get in touch with other Alumni

[GRACECHRISTIAN.EDU/ALUMNI](https://gracechristian.edu/alumni)

2019

GRADUATION



COMMENCEMENT IS A FAVORITE TIME OF THE YEAR for faculty, staff, and students! The Class

of 2019 has special significance because the Class of 2019 is the first to graduate from Grace Christian University!

Friends and family gathered at Watermark Country Club on April 26 for a banquet in honor of their graduate. The Commencement Ceremony followed on the morning of April 27 at Rush Creek Bible Church. With the venue packed, and we were able to celebrate our 195 godly graduates prepared to serve Christ in Church and Society.

Rachel Stevens, Brook Seekins, and Brittany Willingham delivered the commencement address. We are honored to include some highlights from their speeches. Complete transcripts will be available upon request.



Rachel Stevens

THERE ARE A LOT OF REASONS TO CELEBRATE TODAY.

We are all about to step into a new season of life. Whether that is a new career or furthering education, there are some big changes and decisions taking place. Those changes can be scary yet exciting. Lets' praise God that He has brought us this far! We are not the same people who walked on Grace's campus on registration day. We have grown and we have changed. God has been molding and shaping us in these past years for His purpose.

God doesn't provide us with wisdom without His plan for using it. Are you going to live out what you have learned or are you going to waste it? Use it! **If I've learned one thing in these past years, it is that God's wisdom is far greater than our own!**

I challenge you to be a lifelong learner. I pray we will never lose the hunger for learning about God and growing and pursuing what actually matters. The full extent of wisdom comes from surrendering our own wisdom and putting our full trust in His plan and His wisdom. **Wisdom is not knowledge to attain, wisdom is a Person to know, and that person is Jesus.** The purpose of life is to know God - to have a right relationship with God. There is a big difference between knowing *about* God and *knowing* God and having a relationship with Him. God created us for relationship.

So, whatever you do, whichever job you pursue, do it as unto the Lord as an offering to Him because *He is worth it.* God's wisdom is perfect. He is a relational God, and *He is worth it.* While the world, our relationships, and circumstances will change, God remains faithful. He will never change. He will continue to be wise, provide understanding, and despite our failures, He will be faithful in His love for us. May we be excited to live out the call God has on our lives and seek out His wisdom and build upon our relationship with the One who matters the most.

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> GRADUATION 2019



Brook Seekins

HELLO FROM LILONGWE, MALAWI!

Greetings to all who are gathered today for this wonderful celebration. God is the one who deserves all the glory and honor on such a day. God is the One Who enabled us. God is the reason we started on this venture. He is the One Who comforted and encouraged us along the way, and He is our Sustainer. We are grateful to You, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

As a full-time missionary, going back to school was not feasible for many years. God opened doors in a unique way for me, and I started taking online classes while I was stateside; within the first few months of starting classes, I handed in assignments from another country and

from multiple states as I traveled around the US. I finished my last classes in my new home in Malawi while studying a new language and learning a new culture!

Each of us has a story to tell about how we journeyed through the process of getting this degree. Whether we studied on campus or at home, we learned, grew, and were challenged in ways that will help us in our future service to the Lord. *God has used this time to give us training both inside and outside of the classroom. We are just a little bit more educated, a little bit more experienced, a little bit more enabled to do the ministries and jobs that God has for us. God has a plan for our lives.* We cannot know all the opportunities that lie before us, but it is exciting to know that God has it all figured out already!

He wants us to be faithful to Him. Whether we have “small” opportunities to serve in everyday tasks, or new, “big” opportunities in life, whether we serve in our hometown and state or move across the globe, *God has created us, saved us, and trained us for His purposes. We*

do not know what God has in store for us, but we do know He is in control – He is the author of our book and He long ago prepared works for us to do! So, whatever field, whatever degree, whatever your past... know this: *God is in control and is working for His glory.* He has something planned for you which you may have never expected! Keep walking in Him day by day, and look forward to those opportunities – whatever they may be.



Brittany Willingham

AS I REFLECT ON MY TIME AT GRACE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY, I do so not only with a smile but with a measure of



President Ken Bruce Kemper addresses the graduates and their guests

wisdom that I am honored to share with you today. This has been quite a journey for me. God has allowed me to view my journey from a biblical perspective that is similar to the life of Simon Peter. From Peter's journey and mine I have learned *to drop my net and follow Him, to move from where I was to where I was predestined to be, and to feed Jesus' flock.*

When I entered the graduate program at Grace Christian University, I was a DJ at the #1 radio station in Flint, Michigan. I produced commercials, operated live radio shows, and spun all of the old hits. It was my first real career job and a prayer answered! I was passionate about the job – just like Simon Peter was skilled and committed to fishing! Matthew 4:20 tells us that when Jesus called Simon Peter, he *immediately* stopped what he was doing, dropped his net, and followed Jesus. I wish my story unfolded as neatly as Peter's, but it doesn't. When Jesus came walking past me, I didn't even look up – I just kept on working – I kept on "fishing." I didn't know that my unwillingness would result

in God leaving me without an option. He dropped my net *for* me: since I wouldn't drop the job, the job dropped me.

So, what was my next move supposed to be? I began to see God elevating me from where I was and moving me to where I was predestined to be. Simon Peter went from being a fisherman to a fisher of men. I was going from DJ to graduate student. When Jesus called Simon Peter to be a fisher of men, he could no longer function like a fisherman. As my coursework began to increase, I knew I could no longer function like a DJ. I had to study, thirst, and hunger for Christ in a new way – as a minister of the Gospel.

God is taking us to the places that He assigned to us long before we entered our mother's womb. He is putting our names in places where we have never been, making provisions for things that we haven't yet prepared for. We are fulfilling destiny today just by being here. But as we are fulfilling destiny, more will be required of us. Simon Peter was a fisher of men (which is equivalent

to a shepherd) and was called to feed Jesus' flock. John 21:17 says, "*The third time He said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep'.*"

We have to do more than just wear our titles, we have to do the work assigned to the title! We are shepherds who must feed His sheep: the disenfranchised, the oppressed, the orphaned, the widowed, the black, the white, the non-believers, those struggling with their identity or sexuality. Our work has just begun. We can learn from biblical role models like Simon Peter to drop our nets, transition from where we are to where are predestined to be, and then find and feed our flocks.

Expanding Pastoral Ministry



PAT MCGILlicuddy

EVERY YEAR AT CHRISTMAS TIME our family tradition is to make and decorate Christmas cookies. We roll out the dough and use assorted cookie cutters to make cookies in the shape of trees, candy canes, reindeers, and other shapes. Then, after being baked, we sit around and decorate the cookies. Each of us have different ways that we like to decorate. One of my kids likes to make beautiful masterpieces; she could spend several minutes on each individual cookie. Another one's goal is to quickly decorate as many cookies as possible, not worrying as much about how they looked. My own personal goal is to get as much icing as I can on one cookie so I can enjoy it when I am done. After we are done, no two cookies look alike. They are all unique and different.

One of the phrases I use a lot in pastoral ministry is that *there is no cookie-cutter approach to being a pastor*. What I mean by this is that there is no simple step-by-step training process that ends with a perfect pastor who will work in every situation. Instead, what we find is that God has gifted all of us differently-- this is what makes the Body of Christ so unique. If you try to be the type of pastor that someone else is, then you aren't using the gifts and talents the way God has granted them to you.

Grace Alumnus Jim Shemaria,
Lead Pastor at Celebration Bible Church

Use the gifts that God has granted you for His glory

This matches our ministry at Grace Christian University where we have a diverse group of students seeking to be pastors. This is not just diversity in skin color or nationality, but also in giftedness. Some of our students want to be family pastors, missionaries, youth pastors, and senior pastors. Some are introverts and some extroverts. Some are comfortable speaking in front of crowds, others aren't. Some are outstanding academic students, while others struggle in the classroom. Some are funny, some are smart, some are athletic, some are musically gifted, and the list could go on and on. But ultimately, the message I continue to give them is to *use the gifts that God has granted you for His glory*.

Grace Christian University is all about training pastors to use their gifts. This is not a new statement, but has been the case since our inception. Now as the Chair of Pastoral Ministry, my goal is to continue in the legacy of many great pastors and teachers who sought to train our pastors. My goal is to continue on with much of what has already been happening as well as to add some new ideas that I hope will help to train these new pastoral candidates to serve in an ever-changing world and culture.

WE WILL CONTINUE:

Our Strong Biblical Focus

Students who graduate with a pastoral degree from Grace will be trained in the Bible, theology, and ministry.

They will have completed around 90 credit hours (that's 30 classes!) in those fields. Each student comes to us uniquely. Some have grown up in strong biblical churches and fly through early introductory classes, while for others we are their foundation for biblical understanding. No matter the skill level when entering, all will be challenged to grow in their faith and knowledge of the Scriptures. We have several goals to accomplish this. The first is to lay the foundation of truth at early levels. Then, we teach the students how to study the Bible correctly for themselves. Finally, we challenge them with what they will face out in the world. In the end, students will have a foundational knowledge, the ability to continue their learning for themselves, and be prepared to serve the world and people to which God has called them.

Our Dispensational Emphasis

Grace is committed to teaching our Mid-Acts Dispensational Theology. The challenge that we face today is that many of our students (including some of our pastoral students) come from outside our theological tradition. In the Biblical Studies Program we have an approach which incorporates dispensational theology into all our classes. An example of this is seen in our Old and New Testament Survey courses. In these courses we teach the difference between Israel and the Church, describe the narrative of Scripture as a series of dispensations, show key components of progressive revelation, teach a pre-tribulation rapture, and give practical implications of having a dispensational hermeneutic. Later on when the students take our dispensational theology class, they already have a strong foundation. We also have specific classes for those students who seek credentials from the GGF. One of these

classes is an independent reading class in dispensational theology. In this class, the student will read many classic dispensational texts and get a broader understanding of what some of our early founders taught.

Our Community

Grace has and always will be about community. This is true for all of the campus, but especially for our pastoral students. I can recall my own fond memories of community when I was a student, and I want to ensure it continues. Pastoral students have opportunities to minister together, take classes together, fellowship together, and serve together. This includes ministry trips to different regions, supporting the regional Grace camps, and ministering at local churches.

WE ARE ADDING:

Local Pastors' Teaching & Involvement

One thing I have always wanted to ensure is that the students get to hear multiple voices about pastoral ministry. I think this may come from a feeling of inadequacy that I (and most of us) have about our own ministry, but it also is because different students respond better to different teachers. I also want pastors who are currently "in the field" to feed into our pastoral students. This way they are getting front-line battle reports of what is actually happening in the world and in ministry. This has been accomplished in two specific ways. First, we have local pastors teaching some of our pastoral classes. Specifically, I thank Jim Shemaria (*Celebration Bible Church, Grandville*) and Rob Renberg (*Anchor Point Bible Church, Muskegon*), but others have also been involved in this. I also receive support from local pastors

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who give input on the types of issues that need to be discussed in our classes. This has proved to be very beneficial as there are many topics not specifically talked about in books that would be missed without their crucial input.

More On The Field Training

We are also excited to get our students in the field, practicing and learning how to do ministry. As most of us know in class you can learn a lot from a book but the experience you get on the field is invaluable! Among the topics covered

in pastoral ministry that are much better taught on the field are: pastoral care, church health, pastoral leadership, and church administration. Grace's goal is to connect pastoral students with local pastors for mentoring by their third year. This has the dual effect of training the young pastor, but it also infuses our local churches with young energy. So far, we have found that the local churches are more than willing to take on these young potential pastors. In some cases, these efforts could even lead to future positions in the local church.

Conclusion

We strive to train pastors and prepare them biblically to be the best they can be. Grace Christian University is not their final training ground, *it is really just the beginning*. We could never do this without the support of churches, pastors, and prayer warriors who love the ministry of Grace Christian University. Thank you so very much!



Thus Far

FICTION BY

DR. TESS STOCKSLAGER



LEADING PEOPLE SOMETIMES FEELS LIKE PUSHING A LARGE ROCK. Samuel thinks of

this and smiles. He is too weary to laugh. There is a ringing of thunder in his ears and a faint smell of blood on his hands. But there is peace in Israel on this day.

Samuel shoves the rock into place and starts to allow his tired back to sag against it. But he quickly straightens, berating himself, *This is a sacred rock. Or at least a symbolic one. Show a little respect.*

“Ebenezer,” he says aloud. The people just stare at him. The fighting men among them are caked in dust, sweat, and blood. They look stunned, as if they are still trying to figure out whether it was their skill that defeated the Philistines or whether it was Yahweh, who must have sent that deafening thunder after Samuel sacrificed the suckling lamb. Samuel, by now, has gotten used to the voice of God in his ears. When he heard the thunder, he just muttered, “Speak, LORD.”

Now he repeats himself, louder. “Ebenezer.” He gently taps the stone. “You know how our forefathers set up a memorial after they crossed the Jordan? This is like that.” *Except I have only enough energy for one stone.*

“Thus far Yahweh has helped us”

He makes a sweeping gesture with his hand. “Thus far.” He is talking about this spot, between Mizpah and Shen, where the people repented of their idolatry and were answered with a surprise attack by the Philistines.

But he is also talking about the Promised Land as a whole. It’s been generations, but some of the old people still call it that. No unfaithfulness from within, no attack from without can wrench this land away from the people of Yahweh. Samuel still believes that. The LORD helped them to this land, and he keeps sending judges and prophets—some wise, some as dense as a sheep, some with strange ideas and bizarre behavior, but all *called*—God keeps sending them to protect the land and its people from Philistines, famine, and foolishness. The ark of the LORD sits at Kirjath Jearim, but the presence of the LORD is all over this land, ringing in the ears and kindling the hearts of the called ones.

When Samuel says, “Thus far the LORD has helped us,” he is also thinking about his own life. He closes his eyes against the blinding sun and sees pictures on the insides of his eyelids. The coats his sad-faced mother used to bring him every year. The chilly, echoing darkness of that night when Someone kept

whispering his name while he was trying to sleep. Eli’s old eyes squinting at the messenger who told him the glory of the LORD had departed from the land.

Samuel is not as old now as Eli was then, but sometimes he feels that old. He is tired of teaching the people the same things over and over again, tired of slitting animals’ throats and crying out to God for the sins of his people. His own sins are enough for him to deal with.

He clears his throat. “I didn’t deliver you from the Philistines.” The people keep staring at him. “Neither did you.” He pauses, hoping perhaps that someone will deliver the crucial line and demonstrate that at least some of his teaching has sunk in. Nobody speaks. Samuel sighs. “It was the LORD.”

The people nod their heads. “It was the LORD,” some murmur.

Good enough, Samuel thinks. “Ebenezer,” he says one more time. “Remember this place.” He makes a gesture that might be a blessing or a dismissal. The people begin to disperse.

Samuel tries not to listen to their quiet conversations, but he can’t help hearing the word “king” once, maybe twice. He knows that people have been talking—not complaining, exactly, but pointing out how different they are compared to all the other nations. They feel strange about being the only people without a king. *It is strange*, Samuel thinks. *It is strange to be chosen. But better to be strange than to be oppressed.* He is still working out a way to explain this.

Samuel hangs around the rock for a few minutes to see if anyone wants to talk about what has happened, perhaps to seek counsel or comfort. Nobody does.

So he begins the hike back to Ramah, where he will eat something and then go to bed. The day is hot, and his beard is itching. And he can still smell the lamb’s blood.

The sun slips behind a cloud, and the voice comes—the same voice he has been hearing since that night when he was a scared little boy. It is no longer in his ears, but in his heart. He realizes this makes him sound crazy.

“They haven’t rejected you,” says the voice of Yahweh.

“Not yet,” says Samuel.

“No,” says the voice of Yahweh. “They are rejecting Me.”

Samuel shivers. The day is no longer hot. “I know,” he says. “Haven’t I served you faithfully, though?”

“Yes,” says the LORD. “You are their judge, their advocate, their rock-pusher. I am their King. They are rejecting Me.”

Samuel closes his eyes and sighs. “Will you give them a good king, at least?” He opens his eyes again, and the cloud is gone. The voice is gone, for now.

Samuel lifts up his eyes and sees his home, where he will rest. Tomorrow he will think of a way to explain to the people about kings. “Thus far,” he says to nobody in particular. “Ebenezer,” he says.

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