

Session 1

- I. Length: 2 hours
- II. Goal: To help participants become familiar with the beginning steps of membership.
- III. Objectives: By the end of Session 1 participants will:
 - A. Know why membership is important.
 - B. Know the difference between casual and covenant memberships.
 - C. Know the basic steps and requirements of membership.
 - D. Know the steps of growing in faith.
 - E. Feel free to ask questions during the class.
 - F. Have the opportunity to build friendships with other class participants.
 - G. Realize the seriousness of covenant membership.
 - H. Experience the encouragement of the Holy Spirit to grow closer to God.
- IV. Outline
 - A. Welcome/Prayer/Introduction of Participants
 - B. Why Membership?
 - C. The Meaning of Covenant
 - BREAK
 - D. Membership Requirements/Steps to Membership
 - E. First Steps: Personal Faith
 - F. Wrap-up
 - i. Tell participants what the next class will cover.
 - ii. Distribute the “Membership Question Form,” page 11 in Course Overview (optional)
 - iii. Distribute *Classic Catechism* book* — One copy for each participant. Participants should read pages 48-58 prior to the next class.
 - iv. Participants should collect at least 2 newspaper articles or TV/radio statements that demonstrate wrong teaching with regard to the Articles of Religion. These statements will be discussed during the next class session.
 - v. Close the class time in prayer.





“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12, NIV).

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV).

Book of Discipline

Introduction Purpose and Character of the Free Methodist Church

The Biblical Concept of the Church (page 1)

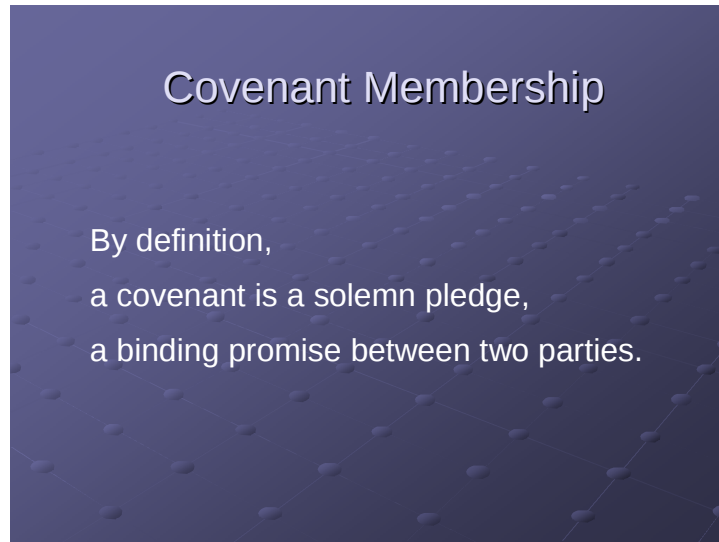
“It is clear from Scripture that the church is *of* God and *for* people. It is His creation. Christ is its head. The church is the people of God chosen for a purposeful partnership in accomplishing the will of God on earth. More than eighty metaphors, word pictures, relating to the church appear in the New Testament. Each portrays a more profound reality than does the picture it brings to mind. The pictures together make clear the nature and mission of the church. Paul speaks of the church as ‘body,’ ‘building,’ and ‘bride.’ The most inclusive and perhaps the most significant metaphor is ‘body of Christ.’ The redeemed are spoken of as ‘members of the body.’”

“What is the profound truth that the many word pictures convey? God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – takes a redeemed people into partnership to share in His activities and to realize His purposes. The church is the organic, corporate instrument God has chosen to remake people and society. It has a mission of holy love. The church exists to produce Christlikeness in all people and their institutions.”



The Scripture views marriage as a covenant relationship.

Ask: How is the relationship you have with your banker, the contract you have with the bank, different from the marriage covenant? (Possible responses: The bank exists to serve me, I don't even have a relationship with any person at the bank, I seldom interact with any person at the bank, I can walk away with very little pain or consequence.)



Definition of Covenant

- “A binding pledge.”
- “Often animals sacrificed would be cut in two.”
- “Sometimes the parties would walk symbolically between the pieces of the animal. In any case, the shedding of blood in such rituals signified the solemnity of the covenant, each party vowing not to break the covenant on pain of death.”
- “The making of covenants often included signs as well. A sign served as a memorial, reminding the parties of their promises.”

[Source: *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*]



God used covenants throughout history as reminders of His promises to mankind. For example, the rainbow is a reminder of God's promise to never destroy the earth by flood. In marriage there is sexual union as a reminder of a promise to love.

Covenants made by God:

Noah — Never to flood the earth again (preserve humankind) — *sign: rainbow* (Genesis 9:9-17)

Abraham — All peoples will be blessed through Abraham's seed — *sign: circumcision* (Genesis 12-17)

Moses — God establishes the Israelites as a holy nation — *sign: The Law* (Exodus 20)

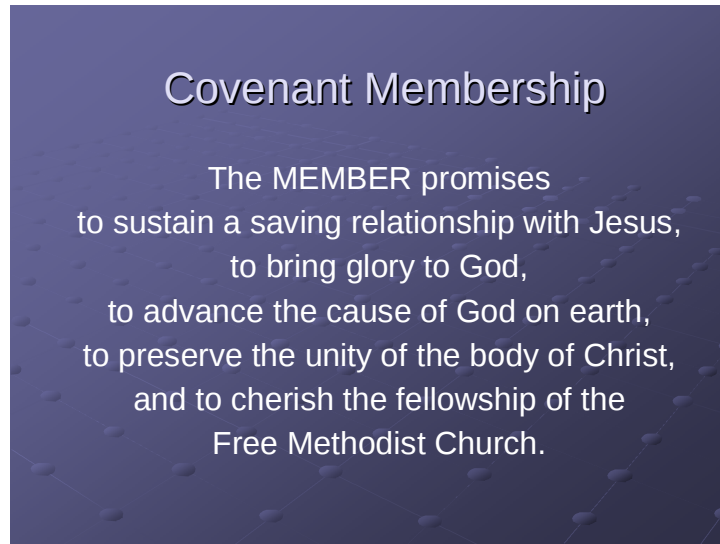
David — A perpetual kingdom — *sign: David's descendants on the throne of Israel*
(2 Samuel 7:1-17; 23:1-5)

Jesus the Messiah — Jesus, the "SEED," institutes The Lord's Supper, a reminder of the fulfillment of the new covenant: Jesus' death on the cross for our sin — *sign: baptism*
(Luke 22:20; Colossians 2:9-12; Romans 6:3-4)

[Source: *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*]

Covenant Membership

The covenant of membership in the Free Methodist Church is a promise between the church and the member.



Book of Discipline

Membership Covenant

Privilege and Responsibility

¶154 “Membership in the Church is a high privilege and responsibility. We believe the Covenant required of members is consistent with the teaching of the written Word of God. Faithfulness to the covenant is evidence of the individual member’s desire to sustain a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord, to bring glory to God, to advance the cause of God on earth, to preserve the unity of the body of Christ and to cherish the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church.”



Book of Discipline

Articles of Religion - The Church

¶121 “The church is created by God. It is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head. The Holy Spirit is its life and power. It is both divine and human, heavenly and earthly, ideal and imperfect. It is an organism, not an unchanging institution. It exists to fulfill the purposes of God in Christ. It redemptively ministers to persons. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that it should be holy and without blemish. The church is a fellowship of the redeemed and the redeeming, preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments according to Christ’s instruction. The Free Methodist Church purposes to be representative of what the church of Jesus Christ should be on earth. It therefore requires specific commitment regarding the faith and life of its members. In its requirements it seeks to honor Christ and obey the written Word of God.”

Membership

¶151 “The requirements of full membership are:

C. a covenant to support the church, to live in fellowship with the members thereof, to be an active participant in the ministry of the church and to seek God’s glory in all things;”

¶152 “The rights of full membership are:

- A. participation in the sacraments and ordinances of the church;
- B. eligibility to vote and hold office upon reaching the age designated by the general conference;
- C. trial and appeal if charged with failure to maintain the conditions of membership, with the specific provision that joining another religious denomination or sect shall of itself sever membership in the church without trial.”



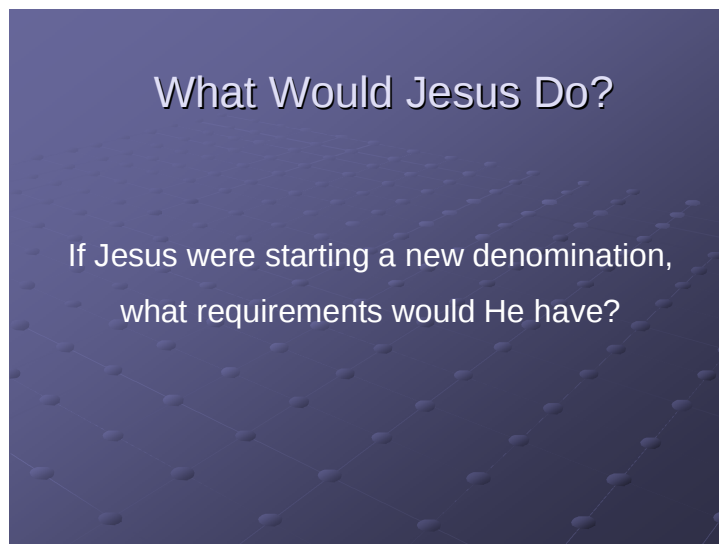
Ask: “Do any of you belong to Block Buster Video, or to the YMCA?” “What club memberships do you hold?”

Ask: “What are the requirements for becoming a member of these organizations?”

Rhetorically ask: “Have you ever joined a group, made promises to each other and then later broken those promises?”

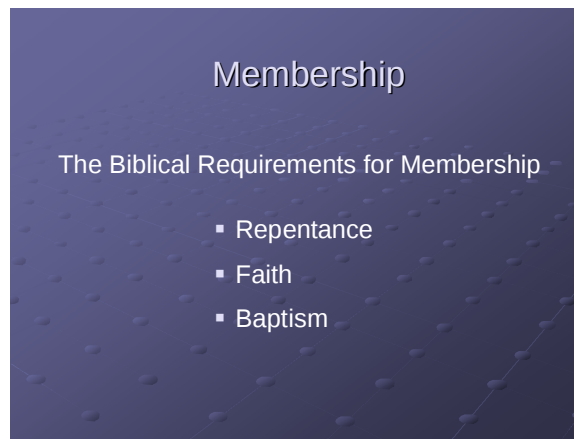
Ask: “Can you think of other membership covenants of which you are a part?” (Examples might include; physicians who have taken the Hippocratic Oath, judges or law enforcement officers who have sworn oaths, ordained ministers of other denominations, or participants who are married having made promises to love.)

Ask: How are covenant membership and casual membership fundamentally different?



Ask: "If Jesus were starting a new denomination, what requirements would He have for membership?"

Ask: "What do you think the basic requirements of church membership should be?"



Book of Discipline

Membership

¶6100 “In harmony with our mission statement we invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith. We are open to all whom God has awakened and support them with the healing and equipping power of the Holy Spirit in His church. The Biblical requirements of repentance, faith and baptism make membership in the Free Methodist Church as nearly as possible synonymous with entering into the body of Christ.”

Let’s look at what Scripture says. This scripture is a portion of Peter’s sermon on the first day of the beginning of the church.

Acts 2:36-47, NIV

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” Peter replied, ‘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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”

“With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”



Say: “The next four slides outline the four requirements for membership. Don’t worry about understanding the details at this point. We are showing them to you now as a framework for what we’ll discuss in more detail in later sessions.”

Book of Discipline

Membership

¶151 “The requirements of full membership are:

“... Christian baptism, confession of a personal experience in regeneration, and a pledge to seek diligently until sanctified wholly if that experience has not been attained;”

Repentance, faith and baptism are the beginning steps in belonging to the church but they are not the completion of God’s hope for us. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus about the matter of growing in Christ.

Ephesians 4, NIV

1“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ...

so that the body of Christ may be built up 13until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

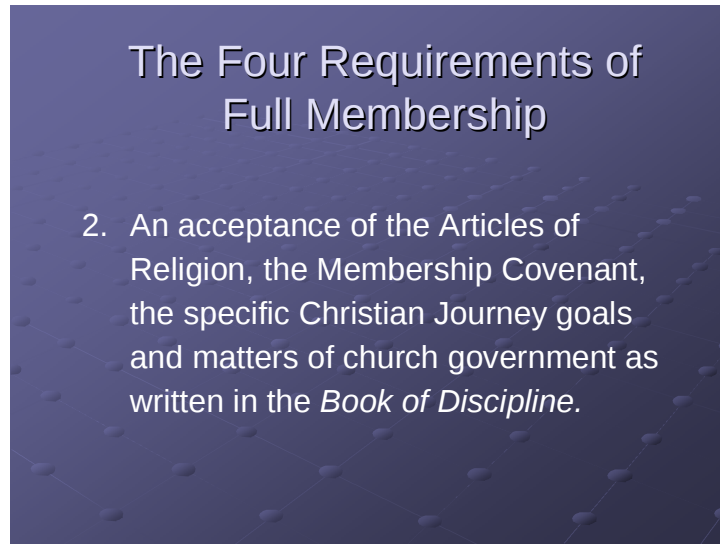
14“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

17“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. 20You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

29“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Reflection: In verses 18 and 30 Paul writes about “hardening” our hearts and “grieving” the Holy Spirit. What do we learn about the person of the Holy Spirit from these verses? What do we learn about ourselves from verse 18 or what happens when we harden our hearts? How might we harden our hearts?

In verses 29-32, Paul writes a list of imperative instructions. Why do you think Paul sandwiches verse 30 between verse 29 and 31?



Note of explanation to the leader:

With the revision of Chapter 3 in the *Book of Discipline*, the Membership Covenant statements from chapter 1 are also now included in Chapter 3 (The Christian Journey chapter). In fact, the Membership Covenant commitment statements serve as the outline for chapter 3.

The specific Christian Journey Goals of chapter 3 are called the goals for Christian Conduct in chapter 1. (See ¶151 B. below.) Think of the Christian Journey Goals of chapter 3 as an expansion of the briefer commitment statements of the Membership Covenant of chapter 1. It is important that participants understand both the broad commitment statements of the Membership Covenant and also the specific Christian Journey Goals of chapter 3.

Book of Discipline

Membership

¶151 “The requirements of full membership are:

“... acceptance of the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct and matters of church government as written in the *Book of Discipline*;”



Book of Discipline

Membership

¶151 “The requirements of full membership are:

“... a covenant to support the church, to live in fellowship with the members thereof, to be an active participant in the ministry of the church and to seek God's glory in all things;”



Book of Discipline

Membership

¶151 “The requirements of full membership are:

“... approval of membership by the local board of administration and the candidates public declaration of membership vows.”



Membership Instruction — It's important that you complete the membership instruction so you fully understand as best you can the commitment you are making to the church.

Approval by the local church board — The pastor will want to meet with individuals privately for an informal discussion about any questions the participants have and discuss the next steps of board approval.

Public declaration of faith — This is the time when the participant comes forward during a public service and affirms their faith and commitment to the Free Methodist church by participating in the membership ritual.

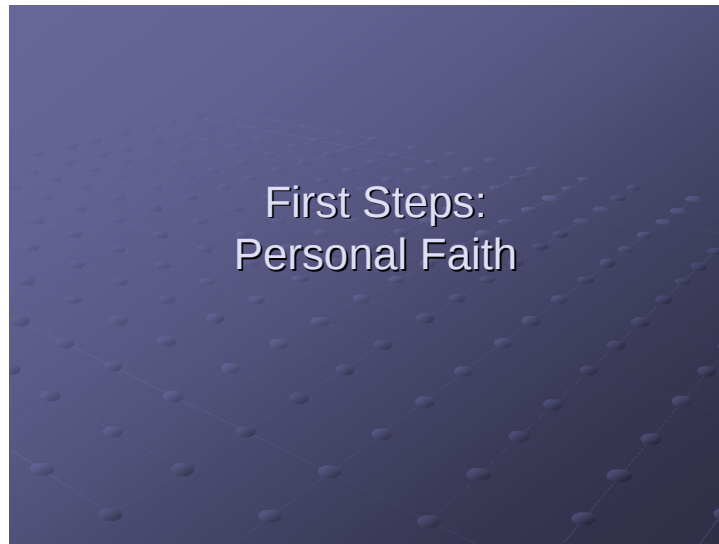
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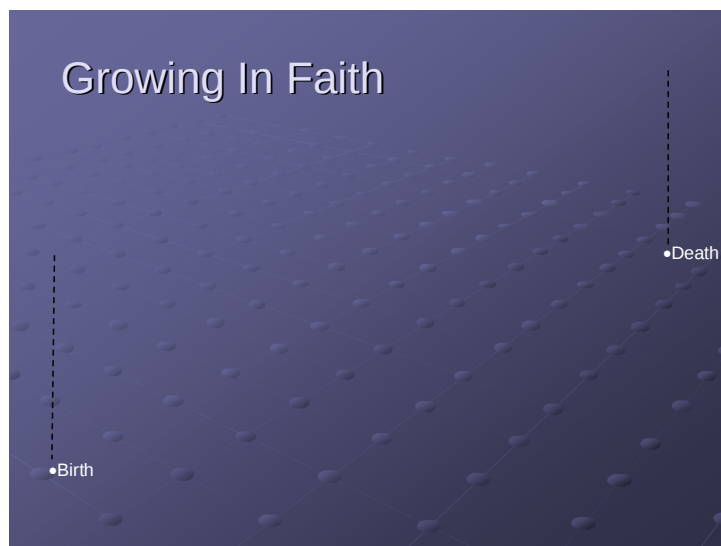
Lay Membership

Adult Membership

¶8800 *“Those who are to be received into membership shall be called forward by name, and the pastor, addressing the people, shall say:*

‘Into this holy fellowship the persons before you, who have received the sacrament of baptism, who have learned the nature of these privileges and duties, who have been instructed in the teachings and mission of the Free Methodist Church and who have been approved by the local board of administration, come to be welcomed into membership. We now propose, in the fear of God, to question them as to their faith and purpose, that you may know that they are ready to be admitted into this church.’”





Initial appearance of slide — By virtue of being alive, all of us are on a life journey — from birth to death.



1st ENTER keystroke — The Bible says that all have sinned (Romans 3:23).



2nd ENTER keystroke — Before we know Christ, we're living life on our own terms, doing things our way. Modern culture worldview says mankind is basically good. A look at Romans 1 and 2 describes mankind turning away from God even though God's law is written on our hearts.

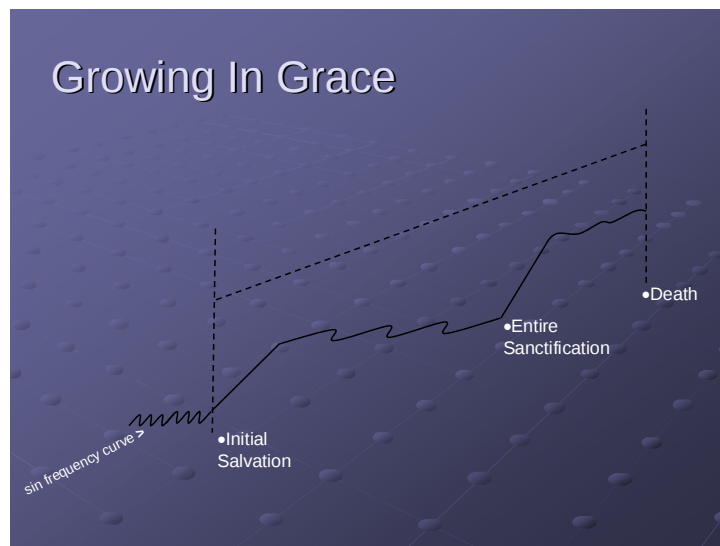


3rd ENTER keystroke — At the point of initial salvation, the new believer receives the forgiveness of sins and begins to follow Jesus Christ. (This is repentance — walking in a new direction.) The new believer receives the Holy Spirit at the point of initial salvation (Acts 2:38, Ephesians 1:13).

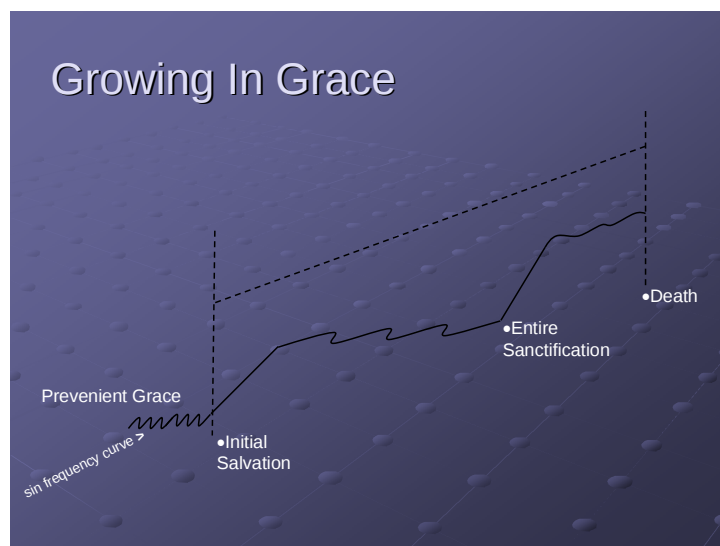


4th ENTER keystroke — The point of “entire sanctification” happens when the believer gives themselves entirely to God. There is no set time for when a believer comes to this place in their relationship with Christ. The important point is that the believer *come* to this place of total commitment to Christ, and continue to say “yes” to the Holy Spirit’s guiding in every part of life.

John Wesley referred to “entire sanctification” as “Christian Perfection”. Wesley did not mean perfection in terms of absolute perfect performance. He meant perfection in terms of our motivation and the intention of our hearts to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). This love for God and others will grow as we mature in faith. Wesley wrote on this subject in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in 1767. A paraphrase of Wesley’s book was written by Bo Cassell entitled, *A Perfect Life: A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, published by Barefoot Ministries in 2005.

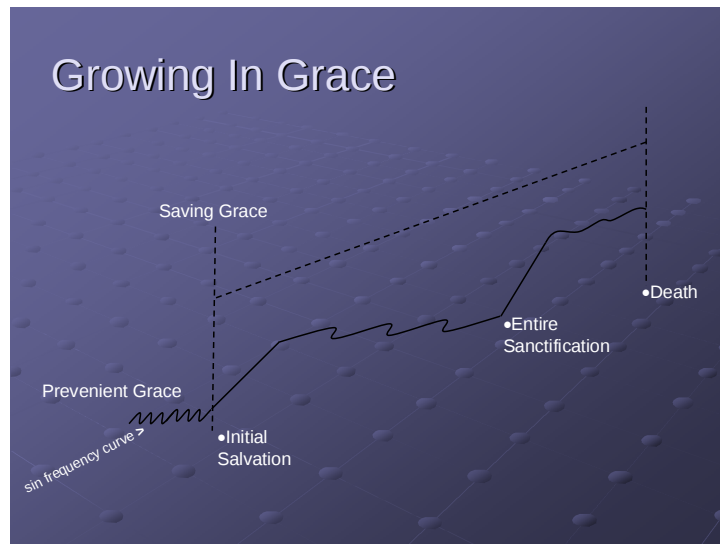


Initial appearance of slide — Our faith in Christ is a gift of God’s grace. The Christian Journey is marked by different periods of God’s grace.



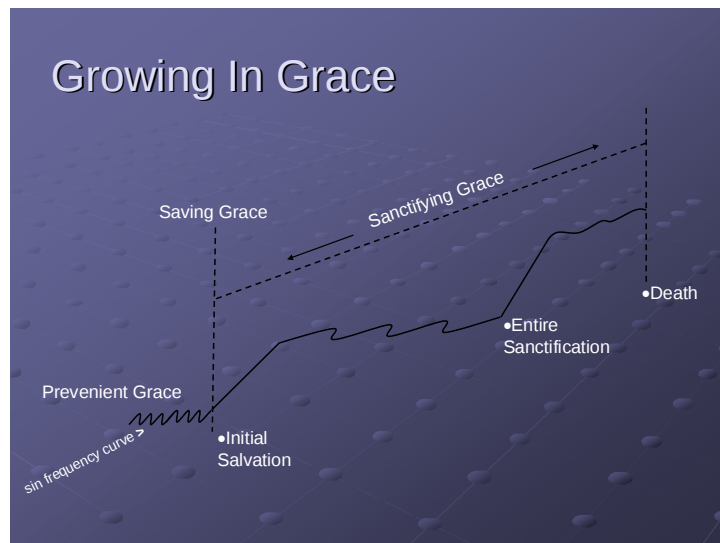
1st ENTER keystroke — **Prevenient Grace** — This is the period of time before we know Christ or are perhaps even aware of our need for Christ. Prevenient grace refers to the “grace that goes before.” It is God’s work in our hearts and lives before salvation in Christ.

Take a few moments to pray for someone who doesn’t know Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to “wake up” their hearts to God’s love for them and their need for Christ Jesus.

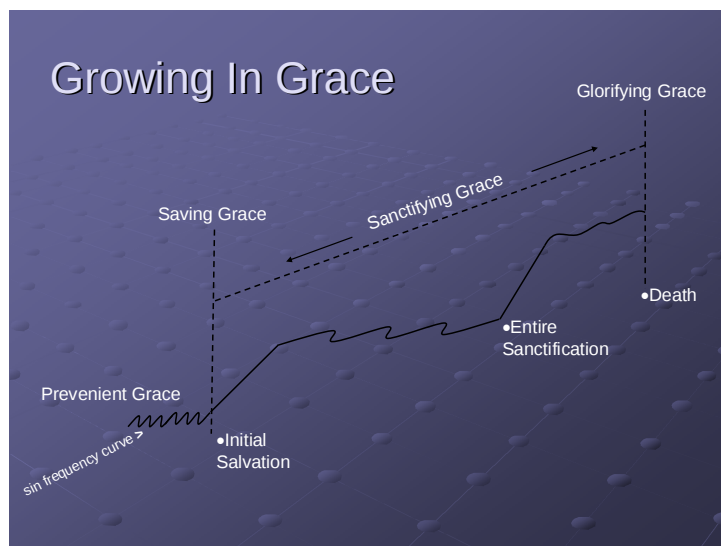


2nd ENTER keystroke — **Saving Grace** — This grace refers to the gift of salvation. We receive God’s saving grace at the point of our initial salvation.

There is nothing we can do to receive this saving grace. It is a gift from God. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV).



3rd ENTER keystroke — **Sanctifying Grace** — This grace refers to the sanctifying (cleansing) work of the Holy Spirit we receive at the point of initial salvation. Sanctifying grace continues to be at work in our lives as we continue to grow in our relationship with Christ Jesus.



4th ENTER keystroke — **Glorifying Grace** — This grace refers to the grace God gives Christians at death. It is the grace of God that brings us to the glory of Heaven with Christ Jesus Himself.