

I Timothy 4:11-16
“The Ordinary Means of Grace”

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Ordinary Means of Grace-based Ministry

Sometimes I am asked, “What exactly do you mean by ‘ordinary means of grace-based ministry?’” Good question. The “ordinary means of grace” are “the Word, sacraments, and prayer.” These are the ordinances given by God with which spiritual life is nurtured. By ordinances we mean spiritual instruments of grace and growth in grace appointed by God in the Bible. So, when we say ordinary means of grace-based ministry, we mean a ministry that focuses on doing the things God says are central to the spiritual health and growth of His people.

Hence, the key things that the church can do in order to help people know God and grow in their knowledge of God are: (1) emphasize the public reading and preaching of the Word; (2) emphasize the confirming efficacy of the sacraments; and (3) emphasize a life of prayer, especially expressed corporately in the church.

Ordinary means of grace-based ministry believes that God means what He says in the Bible about the central importance of these public, outward instruments for spiritual life and growth. God explicitly instructs ministers and churches to do the following things: (1) “give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Timothy 3:13); (2) “preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2); (3) “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19); (4) “This is My body, which is for you; . . . This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:24-26); (5) “I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made . . . Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands” (1 Timothy 2:1, 8).

These are the main ways God’s people grow. We are saved by grace through faith, faith alone in Christ alone. But the instruments, the tools of God’s grace to bring us to faith and grow us in grace are the Word, prayer, and sacraments. Nothing else we do in the church’s program should

detract from these central instruments of grace, and indeed everything else we do should promote and coalesce with them.

By the way, ordinary means of grace-based ministry is precisely the approach to ministry commended by the Westminster Assembly. For instance, in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* we read:

Q.85 What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse, due to us for sin? A. To escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, *with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.*

Q.88 What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption? A. *The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.*

Q.89 How is the Word made effectual to salvation? A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Q.90 How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation? A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

Q.91 How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation? A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

Q.98 What is prayer? A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

This guide to worship is written by the minister and provided to the congregation and our visitors in order (1) to assist them in their worship by explaining why we do what we do in worship and (2) to provide them background on the various elements of the service.