

Emmanuel's Orchard



**A Plan for
Growing in Jesus Christ**

Emmanuel Presbyterian Church

Growing in Jesus Christ

If you are a Christian, something supernatural has happened to you. The Lord has planted his own life in you and has made you part of his “orchard.” This means at least three things: (1) you can expect to grow spiritually; (2) you can expect to bear fruit that will benefit other people; and (3) you should plan to grow in the context of God’s community (this is why the local church is so important).

The leadership at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church (EPC) wants to help you grow. For this reason we have developed “Emmanuel’s Orchard,” a plan designed to provide you with ample sun and water so that your roots will sink deep and the Lord’s life will begin to flourish in and through you. The plan has five growth-stages to it, each of which (more or less) builds upon the one before it, and identifies for each stage (1) what you need to know, (2) what you need to know how to do, and (3) what you need to experience. We provide as well several resources to help you along with each stage, from “Orchard Sundays” (described more fully later), to materials and studies in Home Fellowship Groups, to accountability relationships, to books for individual or group study, to service opportunities, and others.

We hope that you stay planted in our particular acre of the Lord’s orchard for a long time, helping to develop an ever deepening culture of love, service, and accountability. But we realize that your stay here may be brief (many of our people come to New York for school or for the early stages in their career development). For this reason we have designed the curriculum to be gotten through in a three-year time period.

Here is the plan:

Growth Stage I: Planted in Jesus—Beginning Your New Life

Growth Stage II: Nourished in Jesus—Sinking Your Roots Deep

Growth Stage III: Part of God’s Orchard—Thriving in the Church

Growth Stage IV: Producing Fruit and Giving Shelter—Bringing Life to the World

Growth Stage V: Continuing to Grow—Pressing on at EPC and Beyond

We recommend that you walk through these stages in sequence, filling in the gaps as you go (elders and other leaders will be happy to help you with this). But we do not require a strictly sequential approach. You may find, for example, that you are ready for stage two already—which is perfectly fine with us. You may also find that it is impossible to proceed in perfect sequence, since a seminar related to the workplace (stage four) may be scheduled prior to the first Intro EPC Class (stage one) that you are able to attend. The idea is to move as sequentially as possible with the aim of getting through all that we offer over a two to three year period.

The danger with any “growth plan” is that we turn it into a gimmick. Please resist doing this. Whatever you do with the resources we are offering you, remember that the heart of the matter is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When Jesus said, “Abide in Me,” he did not mean, “Follow a plan.” He meant what he said: “Stay close to Me, enjoy Me, discover Me; for I bring you home to the Father, the source of all that is good, true, and beautiful.” Orchards blossom and yield lovely things not by “working hard,” but by drinking in the sun and the rain. May it be the same for all of us.

Here are the details of the plan:

Growth Stage I: Planted in Jesus—Beginning Your New Life

What you need to know:

- The gospel message
- The meaning of biblical love
- That trials are a normal part of the Christian pilgrimage
- The basic outline and structure of the Bible
- The basic story of the church
- That the Lord gives spiritual gifts to each of us for the benefit of the others

What you need to know how to do:

- Articulate what you believe
- Identify where biblical love is missing or weak in your relationships and to begin to love more fully those who are close to you: family, friends, co-workers, those you date
- Get through trials by understanding why they come and what they are for
- Discern your spiritual gifts

What you need to experience:

- Faith in Jesus Christ
- Membership in the church
- Baptism
- The Lord's Supper
- Using your spiritual gifts for the benefit of others in the church

The resource we offer for these things:

- Public worship, where the gospel is preached and the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are celebrated regularly
- The Intro EPC Class—where we go over basics about the Bible and about what Christians believe. You will need to take this if you plan to join the church—but anyone is welcome.
- The Accountability Workbook: A guide for self-starting a one-on-one or small group relationship whose aim is to help you grow as a disciple of Jesus. Use it with one or two friends

from your Home Fellowship Group, or with anyone who wants to grow. Booklets are free and available on the Welcome Table.

- Personal stories in public worship—where you get to hear others articulate their faith, and where you may well have the opportunity to articulate your own
- “Bible and Church History Basics” class: Offered on alternate years, each class involving 3 Sunday sessions after church.
- Special sessions (usually on Orchard Sundays) on how to share your faith, how to get through trials, and how to discern your spiritual gifts.

Growth Stage II: Nourished in Jesus—Sinking Your Roots Deep

What you need to know:

- What the “means of grace” are: Fellowship, the Word, Prayer, the Sacraments, and a Missional Life (FWPSM)
- Why FWPSM is important
- That the Bible’s purpose is to lead us to Jesus Christ
- That we find and know ourselves only as we give ourselves away in love to others, especially those who are unable or unwilling to repay our efforts

What you need to know how to do:

- Make regular and profitable use of the “means of grace.” This includes knowing how (i) to pray, (ii) to benefit from the Lord’s Supper, (iii) to feed on Jesus Christ in every part of the Bible, (iv) to seek out and benefit from intentional and accountable Christian fellowship, (v) to share what you believe
- Preach the gospel to yourself
- Share your faith with a friend
- Love the “poor:” people with fewer choices than you have, people who cannot or will not pay you back, people who are not like you

What you need to experience:

- A devotional life in which you are spending time in the Bible and in prayer every day, or nearly every day, and in which the gospel is continually refreshing you
- Regular accountable Christian fellowship (at least once every two weeks, usually 1 on 1)) whose aim is to help you and those you meet with grow as disciples of Jesus
- Regular thoughtful participation in the Lord's Supper
- Participation in church-wide prayer events where you learn how to pray not simply for your own needs but for the kingdom of God to come to the world
- Sharing your faith with friends
- Opportunities to give your time, money, and talents to the poor

Resources EPC provides:

- Accountability Relationships (see Growth Stage I)
- Home Fellowship Groups, where friendships grow around prayer, a study of the Bible and service to the church and community
- Regular preaching on the “means of grace”
- Regular church-wide prayer events: Weekly prayer before worship, monthly “First Friday” prayer meetings (the first Friday of every month), and twice yearly “Mornings of Prayer” (in January and September). All of these prayer times include coaching on how to pray and actual experience praying
- “Christianity Explored” groups, and certain Orchard Sundays, to which you can invite un-believing friends
- Volunteer opportunities made available through our Mercy Team: mentoring a city child, helping out with a dinner for homeless people, etc.

<h2>Growth Stage III: Part of God's Orchard—Thriving in the Church</h2>

What you need to know:

- Why the church is so important to Jesus and to us

- The particulars about EPC: What we believe, how we fit into the broader church, what we are aiming to do, and how we function

What you need to know how to do:

- Articulate EPC's vision and commitments
- Discern the marks of a healthy church, and identify when and why a church's (or a Christian ministry's) message and ministry is off-center

What you need to experience:

- Regular proportional giving to the ministry of the church (tithing)
- Leading or helping to lead a small group
- Regular commitment to a "housekeeping" ministry of the church (Sunday operations, children's ministry, etc.)
- The joy and challenge of bringing an unbelieving friend to Christ—or at least to church
- The dynamic of a church plant in its early stages of development, either through visiting or through committed involvement
- A love for the church and her ministry

Resources EPC provides:

- The "Growing Deeper" Class (required for officer candidates—open to anyone—taught once a year): The class focuses on all the "need to know" items listed above, together with the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the deep dynamic of living by the gospel.
- Training seminars for church ministries: home fellowship group leadership training, children's ministry training seminars, sound system training, music-in-worship workshops
- Life skills seminars and presentations: Financial planning, conflict resolution, sex and dating, and how to think about money
- A daughter church to visit, to pray for, and possibly commit to

Growth Stage IV: Producing Fruit and Giving Shelter—Bringing Life to the World

What you need to know:

- What the church is here for: To make disciples worldwide through establishing churches that are gospel centered and committed to mercy and justice
- That the gospel message is “Jesus is Lord of all” (not simply, “Believe in Jesus and you will go to heaven when you die.”)
- That the Bible presents us with a worldview (way of living and thinking) that challenges every other worldview we encounter
- That we all have a calling

What you need to know how to do:

- To help a new believer with the basics: studying the Bible, praying, engaging in edifying Christian fellowship, sharing his faith
- To bring the reign of Jesus, and to help each other to bring the reign of Jesus, to everything we think and do—including academics, work-life, relationships, the arts, politics, etc.
- To begin to answer major challenges to Christian faith: Relativism, alternative “Christianities,” the problem of suffering, the trustworthiness of the Bible, the dismissive claims of naturalism
- To discern our calling

What you need to experience:

- Thoughtful interaction with fellow believers who are wrestling with what it means to follow Jesus in your season of life and/or chosen career
- Change in your work place, home, attitudes, and thought-life that arises consciously from the fact that Jesus is Lord
- Events in which the Christian world view competes with opposing world-views
- A missions trip or involvement for at least one year in one of the church’s mercy ministries where you have a “hands on” opportunity to contribute in a focused effort at kingdom advancement

Resources EPC provides:

- Focus groups in which people in the same careers or seasons of life meet to work through what it means to be followers of Jesus where they are. We presently offer these in music, education, and business
- Forums in which believers in particular professional fields share their experience and thinking
- Season of Life seminars: Marriage Preparation, raising children, career planning, etc.
- Preaching that addresses the arguments that are raised against Christian faith and models how to respond to those arguments
- “Tough Questions” Seminars (often on Orchard Sundays) in which the frequently raised challenges to faith are addressed
- The Accountability Workbook, a section of which addresses the question of calling
- Short-term missions opportunities and money to help pay your way to them

Other resources.

- Academy for Christian Thought seminars and materials www.actministry.org/mission_vision.php
- Seminars and resources made available through Redeemer Presbyterian Church’s Center for Faith and Work
- *Mars Hill Audio Journal*: Fascinating and insightful interviews and commentary on the relationship between the Christian faith and a full range of issues in contemporary life and culture (www.marshillaudio.org; 1 800 331 6407)

Orchard Sundays
A Regular Resource Addressing Elements in Every Growth Stage

About eight times annually we gather for “family meals” (on us) following Sunday worship dedicated to learning and community building. The teaching focuses on a topic of general interest (often relevant to non-believers and believers alike) and involves both a presentation and discussion in small groups. We set up our book

table for browsing, often enjoy some music while we eat, and on occasion hear brief reports on recommended reading. During the learning time we provide childcare.

Continuing to Grow—Pressing on at EPC and Beyond

“Higher up and farther in.” That’s how C. S. Lewis describes the Christian life.

Whether you stay on at EPC or leave the city and join a new church somewhere else, there are unlimited joys, discoveries, and opportunities to love ahead of you. You have only just begun. We hope that Jesus has become more fully the center of your life: that his cross has become more fully the reason for your hope, that his Spirit has become more consciously the source of your strength, that his company and the company of his Father have become your deepest joy, that his church has become the community you love more deeply than any other, and that the advancement of his kingdom has increasingly become your deepest agenda.

We hope that, as a result of all these things, you are better able to help your Christian friends along the way, that you are more able and willing to assume Christian leadership, and that you more able and willing to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is Lord of all to the glory of God the Father. Emmanuel—the name we have given to our church—means “God with us.” May God be with you through the grace and cross of our Lord Jesus whatever unfolds in the years to come.

Bibliography

Below you will find a list of books that we recommend. Some are routinely on our book table. Others can be obtained at www.wtsbooks.com. They are arranged according to the various growth-stages that they relate to most closely.

Growth Stage I: Planted in Jesus—Beginning Your New Life

Basic Christianity, John Stott. A classic that lays out the basic message simply and clearly

Eerdman's Handbook of the Bible. A clear and wonderfully informative book on the Bible. It includes outlines and summaries of all the books, time-lines, maps, and enlightening discussions on a wide range of philosophical and historical issues that bear on the Bible.

I Believe: Exploring the Apostles' Creed, Alister McGrath.

The Christian Life, Sinclair Ferguson. Will help you understand how to make real in your experience what Jesus has done for you.

The Story of God, Tom Nelson. A brief overview of the "Story" and main themes of the Bible.

Dust to Glory, R.C. Sproul. Audio or Video tape series covering the story of the Bible.

Growth Stage II: Nourished in Jesus—Sinking Your Roots Deep

Truth in All Its Glory, William Edgar. An up-to-date and winsome presentation of the transforming truths about God and us that powered the Protestant reformation.

What is the Lord's Supper? Richard D. Phillips. Many of us have no idea what sacraments are and why they are so important to Jesus. This booklet will help.

The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament, Charles Drew. Will help you read the Bible in a Christ-centered and life transforming way.

Not The Way It's Supposed to Be, Cornelius Plantinga. If you want to understand, in accessible terms, what sin is and how it works its way into our lives, this is a very helpful read.

When People Are Big and God Is Small, Ed Welch. We tend to think that idolatry is a problem from ancient times that we have somehow gotten past. Welch shows how up-to-date and constant the struggle with idolatry is for all of us.

Other titles:

Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby.

Knowing God, J. I. Packer. A classic and profound discovery of God's character and ways.

Holiness, J. C. Ryle. Will help you understand the foundations for Christian growth through the examination of key ideas like sanctification and justification.

The Lord and His Prayer, N. T. Wright. A thought-provoking and helpful book on the Lord's Prayer.

Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A classic and challenging discussion of fellowship.

The Reformation Study Bible, R.C. Sproul, General Editor. Highly recommended. (English Standard Version is the same one we use in services)

Foundations of the Christian Faith, James Montgomery Boice. A basic systematic theology.

Foundations, R.C. Sproul. Audio/video introduction to systematic theology.

Growth Stage III: Part of God's Orchard—Thriving in the Church

The Living Church, John Stott. Someone said that the church is the one organization that lives for the benefit of its non-members. When we stop reaching out we lose touch with Jesus and spiritually shrivel up.

Why do We Baptize Infants? Bryan Chapell. Many wonder why many evangelical churches baptize children. This booklet gives clear and helpful answers.

Ministries of Mercy, Tim Keller. Jesus tells us that we need to be involved with him in caring for the poor. Tim's book inspires us to do so, and shows us how. Practical and moving.

The Westminster Confession of Faith:

http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/

Westminster Shorter Catechism, with proof texts:

http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC_frames.html

Church: Why Bother? Philip Yancey. If you are looking for an inspirational and honest account of what the church is like and why it is important, this is the book for you. An easy and entertaining read.

The Peacemaker, Ken Sande. A great book on conflict resolution. Written by a lawyer with a good grasp of the Bible.

Growth Stage IV: Producing Fruit and Giving Shelter—Bringing Life to the World

The Reason for God, Tim Keller. Will help you grapple ably with the arguments against belief that you bump into every day.

Simply Christian, N. T. Wright. An up-to-date argument for Christianity's truth.

Surprised by Hope, N. T. Wright. A clear and persuasive account of the evidence for the resurrection.

When God Weeps, Joni Tada and Steve Estes. A practical and readable book about suffering. Joni, a quadriplegic since her teens, has a lot to say on the subject.

A Journey Worth Taking: Finding Your Purpose in this World, Charles Drew. A practical and theological guide to help you figure out what God wants you to do with your life.

A Public Faith: Bringing Personal Faith to Public Issues, Charles Drew. A short and practical introduction on how to be involved in social and political issues without turning the church into a political machine.

Walking With the Poor, Bryant Myers. A great deal of helpful thinking about how to address poverty and work with poor communities in ways that bring transformation.

Pocket Handbook on World Religions, Winfried Corduan. A helpful summary of the major world religions.

Season of Life Issues:

Dating and the Single Life

Song of Solomon, Tommy Nelson. A very helpful book on dating

Boundaries in Dating, Henry Cloud and John Townsend.

Revelations of a Single Woman: Loving the Life I Didn't Expect,

Connally

Gilliam. Honest and practical treatment of the subject.

Singles at the Cross-Roads, Albert Y. Hsu. An upbeat and visionary

approach to living out the single life.

Loneliness, Elisabeth Eliot

True Love in a World of False Hope, Robbie Castleman

Real Sex, Lauren Winner. Honest and accessible treatment of the subject.

Pre-Marital

Pre-Engagement: Five Questions to Ask Yourself, David Powlison and John Yenchko.

Before You Say "I Do," Norman Wright and Wes Roberts.

Audio series on sex and marriage by Tim Keller. Excellent series—vivid,

honest, helpful, life changing. Available through the Redeemer website.

Raising Children

Honey for a Child's Heart, Gladys Hunt. An inspiring book about reading to

children. Includes a marvelous age-specific bibliography.

Shepherding a Child's Heart, Tedd Tripp. A gospel-centered approach to

raising children.

Continuing to Grow—Pressing on at EPC and beyond

The Cross of Christ, John Stott. A deep, informed, and pastoral analysis of the single most important event of Christian theology and of history.

Culture-Making: Recovering our Creative Calling, Andy Crouch. A very fine book on how Christian can integrate their faith with their work.

Mars Hill Audio Journal: Fascinating and insightful interviews and commentary on the relationship between the Christian faith and a full range of issues in contemporary life and culture

(www.marshillaudio.org; 1 800 331 6407).

The Resurrection of the Son of God, N. T. Wright. If you want to become convinced that Jesus' resurrection *really* happened, read this book.