

EXPLORING GCF'S HISTORY¹

Spring of 2002-Present

1 // Preamble

- a. In one sense, we can trace our historical roots can back to the first Christians. We stand in the great stream of Christianity that spans the centuries. More recently, we stand on the shoulders of the great Protestant Reformers of the 16th century and the English and American Puritans of the 17th and 18th centuries.
- b. God gloriously works through time and space to achieve His redemptive plan, saving sinners and sanctifying saints in the context of a local church. The history of GCF is a story about the faithfulness of God, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and the life-changing message of the gospel. It is also a graphic depiction of God's power perfected through human weaknesses. The core values of GCF grew organically out of the particular history of this church and continue to guide us as family of churches in close gospel partnership.

2 // The Seeds of GCF

- a. Grace Christian Fellowship exists to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. That purpose was evident in GCF's very humble beginnings when five families met in the basement of Mark and Kim William's house in North Spokane. These early meetings were the remnant of a difficult situation in which a gospel-preaching Presbyterian church, planted in 1989, was forced to close its doors after a series of unfortunate circumstances. From these ashes, a small group of saints emerged who wanted to establish a new church in Spokane committed to Reformed theology, elder governance, small group ministry, gospel-centered expository preaching, and a robust dependence on the Holy Spirit. This small band of beleaguered saints needed a pastor, so they approached Bill Farley. Why did they contact Bill? Because he discipled a few of them several years earlier. At this point, Bill was a lay pastor at a different church in a different part of Spokane. Mark Williams approached Bill on behalf of the group in the spring of 2002. During their initial

¹ Special Thanks to Brian Huseland, the official GCF Historian, who put together the rough draft of this lesson.

meetings, it became clear to everyone involved that Bill was just the right man for the job.

3 // The Founding Pastor

- a. William P. Farley moved to Spokane in his mid-twenties to attend GU law school. After arriving in Spokane, he met some people involved in the Jesus people movement. A short time later, Bill was dramatically converted to Jesus Christ. For the next 25 years, he raised five children in the ways of God and served as a lay pastor in two churches. In this role, he preached God's word, disciplined men, led worship, and read theology voraciously. While he served the church as a lay pastor, he worked full time for State Farm Insurance. Around age 50, he was able to retire from State Farm Insurance to write Christian books, study God's word, and seek the Lord's will for the next season of his life. Little did he know that in a short amount of time, on the other side of town, a small band of saints would need a pastor.
- b. Increasingly, as he studied the Bible, the Protestant Reformers, and the Puritans, he was astounded by the majesty of God. He realized that there was nothing that humanity could do to save themselves. They were dead in sin and were unwilling and unable to seek God. Man's only hope was the sovereign and saving grace of God. God must choose us since we cannot and will not choose Him. In addition, the Holy Spirit must regenerate our hearts before we can believe. These doctrines, often referred to as the Doctrines of Grace, humble humanity while glorifying God. The more we grow in humility, the more every other virtue will flourish, since humility is the chief virtue. Having been saved during the Jesus People movement of the 1970s, Bill was convinced that all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available for today's church and that all Christians must live in daily dependence on the Holy Spirit.

4 // The Launch

- a. Sensing a call to vocational ministry, Bill and his wife Judy trusted God and accepted the invitation from this small band of families who formed the nucleus of GCF. They started meeting right away in Mark William's home on April 15th, 2002.
- b. In those early days, the Lord graciously added more to our number, and the little church moved to the Fireside Room at Fourth Memorial Church on Sunday afternoons. Pastor Bill did not take a salary for the first few years, enabling the church

to save money for a building and hiring future pastors. Bill preached powerful expository sermons focused on the cross of Christ and the glory of God. These sermons were born out of the conviction that the Bible is authoritative and sufficient for building healthy local churches. During this season, Bill began to form a leadership team with some of the men of the church. The early members also met to choose a name for this growing church: Grace Christian Fellowship.



5 // The First Building

- a. This small band decided to seek a location where GCF could meet on Sunday mornings. After a few months, we moved to the Eat Right Wedding Chapel at 1403 N. Washington Street.
- b. Church services back then were cold—the chapel kept the thermostat very low unless they were hosting wedding events over the weekend. Most people left their coats on during the worship service. On some Sundays, you could see people's breath during the singing portion of the worship service. It was during this phase that men's discipleship meetings began. Training new future leaders has always been a crucial part of our church culture.

6 // *The Second Building*

- a. During these early years, many curious people came to check out the new church in town. Some stayed and we began to put down roots and grow upward. In the spring of 2004, we moved to Our Savior Lutheran Church on North Washington (near North Central High School). This was a dying mainline liberal Lutheran church that rented the building to us until they sold it to the Bethlehem Slavic Missionary Church.



7 // *Our Own Building*

- a. We were able to rent from St. Paul's church on Hamilton St. & Illinois Ave. In late 2005, we purchased St. Paul's for \$425K from an older dying congregation. They could not afford to pay their bills. They eventually moved to another facility and merged with another church. During this time, we believed that God was at work in other churches, and Pastor Bill made an effort to build friendships with other pastors. This is one of the reasons that we intentionally pray for other churches during our worship services. For the first time, Grace Christian Fellowship had its own building. As people started to realize that GCF was sticking around, more and more people took the membership class and joined our church.

8 // The First Elder Board

- a. In early 2005, Bill formally transitioned the leadership team into an Elder Board to be more faithful to scriptural guidelines for church governance. This move demonstrated our commitment to complementarity. The elders and Bill firmly believed that although males and females are equal in value and worth, God has assigned them different roles in the home and the church.

9 // The Growing Elder Board

- a. In October of 2005, the elders decided to hire Dave Farley, Bill's son, to help shepherd our growing church. Dave had recently graduated from Covenant Theological Seminary and was pastoring in Washington DC. He and his wife Heidi moved across the country to join GCF. Dave provided help in preaching, evangelism, administration, youth ministry, discipleship, and college ministry. At this point, the elder board included Mark Williams, Jim Spurgetis, Dave Farley, and Bill Farley. Within a few years, the leadership identified two more elders to help shepherd the expanding flock; John Kershinar (a Boeing Engineer) and Dave Nelson (a Financial Planner). Eventually, both men made great personal sacrifices and quit their lucrative jobs to join the GCF staff full time. Dave Nelson took over the youth ministry and the outreach ministry at the Central Church. Eventually, John Kershinar would lead the counseling ministry and youth ministry at the North Church.

10 // A Season of Growth & Fruitfulness

- a. From 2005 to 2010, we remained committed to our passion for discipleship. During this season, the men's and women's discipleship groups flourished as the curriculum matured. We also launched a college ministry called Veritas and hired a handful of interns to help lead the growing church ministry. Several years later, one of those interns (Brett Sweet) came on staff full time as the Central Church preaching pastor.
- b. During this season, we launched adult and children's Sunday School classes. Both ministries started small but grew slowly over time. Sunday School allows the pastors to address topics that don't come up as often in a church that is committed to expository

preaching from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. Finally, we decided to hire a full-time business administrator from within our congregation.

11 / Blessed to be a Blessing to Others

- a. During this season, we launched a ministry to encourage local church pastors called "The Pastor's Lunch." It meets the last Thursday of every month and is designed to encourage Spokane pastors from a variety of denominations. Over 30 area pastors participate in one form or another. We recruited two of our current pastors from this group (Paul Proctor and Jeff Brinkman).
- b. With the help of Indian Trail Church, we helped launch an additional ministry for pastors called The Spurgeon Fellowship Ministry. This ministry is designed to help pastors grow in the art and skill of gospel centrality. God has graciously blessed both ministries.
- c. GCF is a member of the Inland Northwest Co-operative. The INC seeks to further the work of the gospel in the Inland Northwest by planting churches, training future pastors, and cooperating for local outreach. It will strengthen the health of its churches by providing doctrinal accountability, ministerial fellowship, and support for churches in need. Visit www.inlandnorthwestcooperative.org for more info.

12 / The Seeds of the North Church

- a. In October of 2010, we outgrew our building, which forced us to move to two Sunday morning services. After looking at lots of buildings in central Spokane, we leased space from Fourth Memorial Church for eight months, starting in the fall of 2011. This allowed us to go back to one service. We used the Fireside room for Sunday School, which happened to be the first official location of GCF nearly eight years earlier. During this period Fourth Memorial church approached us about the possibility of merging our two congregations. After lots of prayer and fasting, both elder boards agreed that uniting our congregations would be challenging. We left Fourth Memorial on excellent terms.
- b. In 2012, we moved back to our building on Hamilton & Illinois, intending to plant a North Spokane church, something we had always wanted to do. At this point,

GCF was a little less than 350 people in attendance on Sunday mornings (including children). Roughly 150 of the 350 people lived north of Wellesley.



13 // The Launch of the North Church

- a. Before launching the North Church, the elders researched the pros and cons of the multi-site model of planting churches. After much prayer and reflection, we agreed to adopt the multi-site model. Our first worship service was on October 20th, 2013, with 150 people in attendance, including children.
- b. Finding a meeting space in north Spokane proved to be exceptionally difficult. Eventually, God opened up space at Mead High School through the tireless efforts of Dick Cullen, one of our members and the retired Athletic Director of Mead High School. We stayed at Mead for two years. The growth was slow at first, but over time more and more north siders decided to become members of GCF North.
- c. When our lease at Mead High School expired, we moved even further North, renting space from Mt. Spokane Church on Sunday evenings at 6 pm. We quickly learned that this time slot was detrimental to our church. Fortunately, space opened up at the Northwest Christian School theatre in Colbert WA. We stayed at NWC from 2015-2018. During this time we moved from the theatre to the gym.
- d. This season was our "church in a box" phase. Every week we set up a stage, chairs, nursery space, music equipment, fake walls, coffee equipment, a welcome center, and

many other things. After church, we loaded most of our gear into a few large trailers and drove away. We could have never managed without the countless faithful, humble, and trusty servants of GCF North. Around this time, we purchased a 27-acre plot of land next to Highway 2 so that we could someday build our own church building. Although there was great interest in building a church as quickly as possible it didn't seem like the right time, so we waited.

14 // Growth at the Central Church

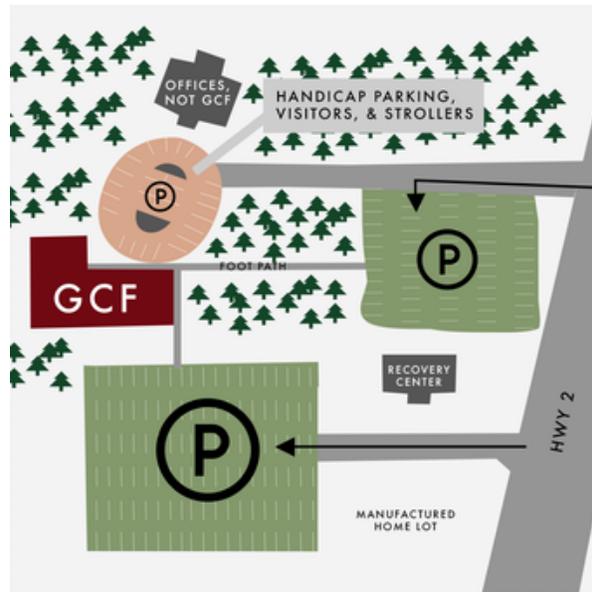
- a. Meanwhile, GCF Central was going through a transition of its own. The void left by North families was quickly filled with new people from the Logan neighborhood, the South Hill, and the Spokane Valley. Just before we launched the North Church, we were able to buy the old tattoo parlor in the parking lot of the Central Church and convert it into church offices. This facility became the hub of operations for both churches. By God's grace, we were able to pay off the land purchase and remodel costs quickly.

15 // Passing the Baton

- a. In 2014, pastor Bill and pastor Dave (Farley) switched roles. Pastor Dave became the lead pastor of GCF, and pastor Bill became the Central Church preaching pastor. Three years later, in 2017, pastor Bill officially retired from GCF. In 2018, Brett Sweet replaced him as the Central Church preaching pastor.
- b. In the fall of 2018, GCF had five full-time pastors. Brett Sweet served as the Central Church preaching pastor, Dave Nelson was responsible for discipleship and outreach at the Central Church, and Jeff Brinkman led the counseling ministry and the Sunday school ministry at the Central Church. Up north, Dave Farley served as the North Church preaching pastor and the lead pastor of GCF. John Kershinar oversaw the North Church youth ministry, college ministry, and the counseling ministry. Around the same time, Drew Schaefer, Josh Soehner, and Dan King joined the elder board as lay pastors, bringing the number of elders to ten.

16 // *A New Building for the North Church*

- a. In the fall of 2018, the elders quickly capitalized on an opportunity to acquire a new facility for GCF North that could be occupied 24-7. This meant no more set up and tear down. The game developer company, Cyan, had an empty wedding venue available which another church had previously leased. This move was a nod to our past at the Eat Right Wedding Chapel, although thankfully a lot warmer. We signed a five-year lease, and we moved in quickly. It was a huge relief to leave everything set up!
- b. On February 6th, 2022, GCF North had our first service in our new building on Newport Rd. in Mead, WA.



17 // *The Launch of the Spokane Valley Church*

- a. After much prayer in the Spring of 2019, the leaders of Grace Christian Fellowship believed that the time was right to add another GCF church. Many families from the city of Spokane Valley joined GCF Central, filling the void left by the North Church launch in 2013. They were eager to see GCF's theology and values take root in the Spokane Valley through a church plant.
- b. In the summer of 2019, the pastors unanimously chose Pastor Jeff Brinkman to lead the charge into the Spokane Valley. But this was going to be an enormous task. To help with this task, the elders hired pastor Paul Proctor in the fall of 2019. Paul has connections with GCF families that go back over twenty-five years.
- c. On November 1, 2020, we launched the Valley Church. We held our first service at the Spokane Valley Event Center and met there until our permanent building at 16610 E. Sprague Ave. was completed Easter Sunday 2021.

18 // Amazed by God's Grace

- a. Today, we can look back with amazement at the handiwork of God. From the tiny beginning of five families and two Farley's, the Lord has blessed us with hundreds of adult members worshipping at our three churches every Sunday morning, a growing number of godly elders, faithful deacons and ministry team leaders.
- b. Currently, Grace Christian Fellowship is a family of churches in close gospel partnership.
- c. On July 24, 2022, all three GCF churches joined together at Fourth Memorial Church to celebrate our 20th anniversary. Giving praise to the Lord for His faithfulness to our church.



- d. Yet through it all, our goal has not been numerical growth, fame, influence, or prestige. Our goal is to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We need God's grace and power to continue to keep the main thing the main thing. We hope and pray that our great-grandchildren are even more committed to this mission than we are.
- e. "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:7). To God belongs the praise, the honor, and the glory!

Conclusion

If the history of GCF has raised any questions about our theology and values, please feel free to bring them up during your membership interview. Or connect with a pastor if you're not yet ready to set up an interview.

