

Welcome to

PARK STREET CHURCH

The Ministerial Staff, Membership Committee, and members of Park Street Church welcome you to the membership class. Our hope is that this class will help you to study the teachings of the church and to find your place in it.

Each lesson describes what the church believes and how we try to live out these convictions. As you learn more about the church, please be praying about how you can become more connected here.

The salvation that is ours in Christ introduces the Christian to an interpersonal reality, the church. In the New Testament, to be a Christian is to belong to the people of God. In Scripture, there is no such thing as an independent or unaffiliated Christian. We see church membership as an organizational expression of a Biblical truth: “in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5).

Based upon the description of the early church in Acts 2:42–47, we see church membership at Park Street encompassing at least four interconnected commitments:

We hold to a common confession in Jesus Christ

Jesus is our Lord and head of the Church. We learn about and proclaim our faith in Sunday worship services, and in Christian Formation classes.

We participate in community life

We seek to love and be loved in our small groups, campus ministries, Family Ministry, and pastoral care and counseling.

We covenant ourselves, including time and resources

New members classes are the starting point of formalizing our commitment to one another. We reaffirm our unity in communion and via the stewardship ministry.

We live out a calling to serve the Lord in the church and in the world

God has given us the privilege to be involved in His activity, through various church committees and teams, including the Missions Program, with student ministries, full-support missionaries and more.

The church is more than shared values and resources; it is the living body of Christ, and “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). The church is a place for giving as well as receiving. Each person in the church is important. We thank you for the gift of your life and your ministry among us. To God be the glory.

Qualifications

FOR MEMBERSHIP

At Park Street Church, the primary qualification for membership is a personal saving faith in Jesus Christ. While none of us can fully examine another to know the deepest thoughts of the mind and soul, still there is evidence in word and deed to the necessary faith. To that end, the Ministerial Staff members and members of the Membership Committee who are leading your New Members Class will hear from each candidate for membership a statement of his or her faith in Jesus Christ. “Testimonies” from candidates for membership will be heard at each class, starting the second week. You will also be asked to sign the confession of faith adopted by this church and printed on the following page.

In preparation for the testimony, each candidate for membership should prepare to present a short (3–4 minute) statement regarding his or her relationship with Jesus Christ. To aid in that preparation, the following outlines are suggested:

For those who became Christians (believers) at an early age or over a period of time so that an exact chronology is difficult:

- An opening phrase identifying yourself
- An indication of your early church experience
- How is it that you know you are a Christian?
- How has being a Christian changed your life?
- Where do you see continued need for change?
- An appropriate Bible verse summing up your testimony

For those who became Christians (believers) as an adult in a clearly defined chronology (as the Apostle Paul does in Acts 26):

- An opening phrase identifying yourself
- An indication of your life before receiving Christ
- An indication of how Christ has changed your life since
- An indication of areas for continued change
- An appropriate Bible verse summing up your testimony

It is perfectly fine for you to refer to written notes when you speak before the class. In addition you may request an opportunity to speak to the Ministerial Staff member leading your class beforehand in order to review your testimony.

In addition to subscribing to the personal confession of faith on page 4, members must also commit to the church’s Covenant of Faith and Government, found on page 25. This statement is distinct from the personal confession of faith and has to do with your pledge to uphold the beliefs and organization of this church while you are among us.

The bylaws also require that members be baptized. If you have not been baptized, please speak with your minister about scheduling your baptism, which can be done on the same day you join.

The other requirements are attending six of seven classes, completing a formal application, and being presented to the congregation.

Confession of

FAITH

I BELIEVE in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; and in the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God.

I REVERENTLY RECEIVE the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and believe them to be the inspired Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

I BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the beginning “was with God,” and “was God,” and who “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24 NIV).

I BELIEVE the Holy Spirit has led me to repent of all my sins, and to turn from them, and to obey Christ where He says, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34 NIV).

I BELIEVE in the resurrection of the dead, and in the final judgment of all people. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36 NIV)

I BELIEVE that we are saved “by grace through faith” in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that good works are the certain fruit of such faith. I therefore offer myself for Christian service as a means of expressing my gratitude to Him, and to extend His cause.

I CHEERFULLY SUBMIT myself to the instruction and government of this church, and I promise to promote its purity, peace, and welfare by all means within my power, so long as I shall continue to be a member.

Class One

THE BIBLE

WHY DO WE NEED THE BIBLE AT ALL?

Psalm 19 tells us about two kinds of revelation, general revelation and special revelation, that stand together in complementary relationship. General revelation tells us that there is

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a God (Romans 1:18–20), while special revelation tells us how to make peace with God (Romans 3:21–26). Special revelation is necessary (2 Timothy 3:14–17). God has written some laws in nature, but not all; some things we cannot know on our own. The witness in creation is non-verbal and leaves us to try to figure out things from the outside. If we want to know a person, we will be limited if we only observe his behavior and appearance. We need the person to talk and open up to us to really know him. God speaks to us so that we can know him, giving verbal communication. He gives that verbal communication in writing, rather than

orally, in order to give us a public standard so we do not delude ourselves. I need to know what God says to you, and you need to know what God says to me: the written Word makes God's truth universal and objective.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE AT PARK STREET

Park Street Church, since its founding in 1809, has held to a “high view” of Scripture. That is, we hold it to be God's inspired, inerrant word that is sufficient for all matters of faith and Christian living. A person who takes his or her Christian faith seriously will want to give serious attention to the Bible in its entirety. It becomes a matter of life commitment to understand properly what God has said to us as a church and to us as individuals.

In addition to hearing the Bible preached weekly, we must spend time daily feasting upon the Word of God. Our high view of Scripture must translate into a deep dedication to know God's Word and to live it out.

The Bible is inspired by God

We believe the Bible is inspired by God. The 10 commandments are the first “Bible,” and set the pattern for all the rest of Scripture (**Exodus 20:1ff; 31:18; 34:27**). First, the moment the commandments were written, they were authoritative; in the same way, the rest of Scripture was authoritative the moment it was written (and not authoritative just because the Church later decided it to be: it is not the Church that forms the Word, but the Word that forms the Church). Second, God commissioned Moses to write and considered Moses' words to have the

same authority as his own. The first stone tablets were “written by the finger of God” (**Exodus 31:18**). After this the people begged for Moses, rather than God, to communicate with them because they were too full of fear. So after the golden calf incident, God told Moses to cut two new stones like the first and that he would write on them as before (**34:1**); however, this time he tells Moses to write what he says (**34:27**). The implication is that there is no difference in the authority of what God commanded Moses to write, and what God had formerly written himself. In the same way, God “commissioned” the authors of the rest of Scripture and considers their words to have the same authority as if he had written with his own finger.

We know that the Bible is the Word of God from the testimony of Scripture itself. Jesus considered the Old Testament, his Bible, to be God’s Word (**Matthew 4:4**; **Matthew 22:41–44**). If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then we must believe his witness concerning Scripture. The writers of the New Testament also considered the Old Testament and their own writings to be authoritative (**1 Corinthians 2:12–13**; **Romans 3:1–2**; **2 Peter 1:20–21**; **3:15–16**). Considering the testimony of Scripture to support that the Bible is the Word of God may seem circular. We must also have the inward witness of the Holy Spirit to know that the Bible is God’s Word (**John 16:12–15**; **Ephesians 6:17** with **Hebrews 4:12**). The inward witness of the Holy Spirit is just as necessary to recognize the Bible as the Word of God, as it is to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. This is not a matter of imparting new information, but of enlightening darkened minds.

The Bible is inerrant

We believe that the Bible is without error (inerrant). The very words of the original texts of the 66 books of the Bible are free from error, not just in matters of faith and practice, but also in all aspects (**Galatians 3:16**, **Matthew 22:32**). The character of God informs the way we approach his Word: it is the product of an all-powerful, all-knowing God who is free from error (**Psalms 12:6**; **18:30**; **19:7**; **Proverbs 30:5–6**; **John 17:17**).

The Bible is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice

We believe that the Bible is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice, or Christian living (**2 Timothy 3:16–17**; **2 Peter 1:3**). Experience is severely limited as a basis for determining truth because it is changeable, ambiguous (it does not interpret itself), and is subject to self-deception. Thus, we should seek to interpret our experience in the light of God’s Word, rather than interpreting God’s Word in light of our experience.

THE BIBLE IS A COVENANT DOCUMENT

Finally, it is instructive to understand that the Bible is a “covenant document.” God made a covenant with Israel that resembled covenants made in the surrounding culture, using what was familiar to the people to teach spiritual truth (like Jesus did with parables). “Covenant” describes the relationship between the King and his people: it bound together two unrelated parties in a new family relationship, a relationship that required certain duties and was guarded by a witness.

A covenant is a three-way agreement (two parties and a witness to enforce it), as opposed to a contract, which is a two-way agreement (two parties, but no witness). In God’s covenant with his people, he is both one of the parties and the witness. All covenants would have a document that described the parties involved and the terms of the arrangement. The Bible,

encompassing the Old and New Covenants, is the “covenant document” that governs our covenant relationship with God. In it, he tells us who he is, who we are, and how we are to live in relationship with him and inherit his promises. All covenants also included a stipulation about how often to read them. In Deuteronomy 31:9–13, we read that Moses commands the law to be read to the people of God every seven years. We have much more than just the law (the first five books of the OT) in our Bible now, but if we were to follow the seven-year plan, we would read about three chapters a week to read through the Bible in seven years. No matter what our reading plan, we are to meditate on God’s Word every day (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

Questions for **REVIEW, THOUGHT & DISCUSSION**

1. What would be the implication for Christianity and for your own life if the Bible were simply an ordinary book and not inspired by God?
2. If someone were to say to you that the Bible can’t be trusted, because it is full of errors and outdated information, how would you respond?
3. What opportunities do you have to hear the Word of God? What can you do to be more intentional about applying the Bible to your life after you hear it preached or taught? Are you currently involved in a small group? Why or why not?
4. Do you have a personal “reading plan” for the Bible? If so, what is it? If not, what can you do to implement one?
5. Read the “Window Into Park Street: Education” on the next page. Have you ever been involved in any of the Christian Formation, international ministry, or Enable Boston activities? If yes, it would be great if you would share your experience with the class.

WINDOW INTO PARK STREET

Education

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

We are called to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds (cf. **Matt 22:37**). Especially given the university-rich environment we find ourselves in, Park Street Church is committed to enabling people to build a vibrant love for God that is academically rigorous and attractive.

WAYS TO BE INVOLVED

- *Attend a class!*
- *Help teach English as a Second Language on Tue/Thu mornings, or Friday nights. Scientific and Legal English is also offered*
- *Teach a children's or adults' Christian Formation class*
- *Serve with Christianity Explored for seekers*
- *Serve as a class facilitator for a Christian Formation class*
- *Lead or assist in a Park Street International Fellowship group*
- *Help a child or adult with a disability on Sundays or Friday nights*

Our Sunday **Christian Formation** classes for adults, youth and children seek to help people to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (**Rom 12:2**). By grappling with biblical themes and real-life issues, our classes seek the transformation of the character and heart of God’s people by God’s word. Some classes and seminars focus on theological topics, spiritual disciplines, or a book of the Bible, while other classes address issues of a certain life stage, e.g., a class for honeymooners or on parenting. The classes for youth and children tackle serious theology and honest life issues.

Christianity Explored provides a safe environment for people to explore the Christian faith, as they share a meal, watch a video, and ask questions. We have a vibrant ministry to international students, scholars, and their families, which has many opportunities for learning and teaching, often with current and future leaders in various fields. **Park Street International Fellowship (PSIF)** has small group Bible studies on

Sunday afternoons. **English as a Second Language** classes are a way to reach out to scholars and their spouses.

Enable Boston, our disability ministry, helps children and adults with disabilities to be active in the life of the church.