GOSPEL TRAINING CENTER

Enjoying the Heart of Christ for the Heart of Ministry

"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Ephesians 3:8)
"I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:8)
"Though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (1 Corinthians 4:15)
"So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Ministers woo for Christ. They open the riches, beauty, honor, all that is lovely in him. One main end of our calling in ministry is to lay open and unfold the unsearchable riches of Christ, to dig up the mine, thereby to draw the affections of those that belong to God to Christ.
–Richard Sibbes

Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely.
–Robert Murray McCheyne

In reading great literature [or theology] I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky… I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.
–C.S. Lewis

This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.
–Aslan in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

Overview

GTC is a 9-month (Sept-May) training program for young men desiring growth and experience in learning a paradigm for affectionate, Christ-enamored gospel ministry in the local church. Our seminaries and Bible colleges do an excellent job of training young men in the classic disciplines from world class scholars. But there are some things that are better learned in the local church—what a gospel culture can look like, how to confess sin to a brother, how to preach Christ to real sinners-sufferers, how to show hospitality, how to build a social environment of honor and encouragement, what it is to foster a culture of discipling, and what actual pastoral ministry looks like day in and day out. In other words, seminaries can tell you the Greek syntax of Philippians 1:8, "How I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Local churches are designed to inculcate young men with a vivid picture of what affectionate yearning in Christ looks like for pastors toward the people for whom they labor in the Lord.

The Gospel Training Center is a sacred stewardship from the Lord to allow men to incubate for a year, either before or after more formal accredited study, or for men later in life who are in between ministry calls. We are counting on our seminaries to teach Greek and Hebrew, systematic theology, and other glorious courses of study. We do not wish to compete with that, though we will have readings in Bible and church history and systematic theology. Rather, we long to come alongside the seminaries in a complementary way with a particular focus on training young men in:

- Encouraging
- Praying
- Discipling
- Confessing
- Honoring
- Growing
- Rejoicing
- Repenting
- Befriending

We will do a *significant* amount of reading and discussing books at GTC, but it will be reading aimed centrally at the heart and character formation.

It is not imperative that the residents are certain that they are headed into fulltime pastoral ministry. Some residents will become lay elders in their churches or will be involved in other kinds of non-profits or parachurch ministries. Some will ultimately work in secular vocations. But the program is centrally designed for those exploring and pursuing a call into pastoral ministry. In short, we recognize that young men today have many teachers and "guides" (1 Cor. 4:15)—through books and podcasts and internet resources. But young men exploring a call to ministry do not have many gospel "fathers" and older brothers in Christ (Phil. 2:22). GTC is a safe and joyful environment of affectionate love in which spiritual fathers and brothers can open their hearts to young men and seek to help them flourish in Christ alongside each other as they prepare for ministry leadership.

Distinctives

The GTC learns from and celebrates other training enterprises operating out of the local church, though it is distinct in a few particular ways:

- *Gospel Culture*. The central conviction animating both NPC and the GTC is that the doctrines of grace are meant to foster a culture of grace. The matchless beauty of our theology and of our God necessarily creates beauty of community—honoring one another, rejoicing over one another, dignifying one another, confessing to one another.
- *Heart Cultivation.* Our Lord Jesus teaches that we speak from the overflow of our hearts (Luke 6:45). Scripture summons us to keep a vigilant guard over our hearts for from them flow the springs of life (Prov. 4:23). We believe it is a sacred trust to help each man learn the art of keeping a close watch on his life and doctrine so that his ministry might be effective and honoring to the Lord for the long haul (1 Tim. 4:16).
- *Historical Orientation*. The GTC believes deeply in the need for recovering and learning from the best of historic pastoral ministry. This 9-month project is largely an immersion in Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Newton, Bavinck, Spurgeon, and who pierce the soul with a vivid sense of the glory of God in Christ.
- *Unapologetically Reformed Rejoicing*. As a confessional PCA church, Naperville Presbyterian Church and the GTC operate out of a seriously joyous Calvinism that celebrates a big God with big grace for big sinners. Cohort members need not be PCA, but they are expected to gladly embrace one of the four great reformed confessions (Westminster, London Baptist 1689, Belgic Confession, or 39 Articles). The books we choose to read are primarily in the stream of God-entranced, Christ-enamored, Bible-drenched, affection-raising happy Calvinism.
- *Pastoral Immersion*. The GTC will immerse its cohort members in elder meetings, discipling students, hospital visiting, service planning, praying, staff meetings, reading together, and so on.
- *Seminary Advanced Credit*. The GTC is seeking to partner with select seminaries that are willing to grant advanced course credit for a future degree (M. Div., M.A.T.S., etc) upon the completion of the GTC program.
- *Pure Fun*. We wholeheartedly agree with Charles Spurgeon that "the highest spirituality finds a fitting exemplification in the brightest and cheeriest character." Christian life and ministry ought to be characterized by a "sparkling joy" in the risen and ascended Christ, in total defiance of sin, Satan, and cynical, gloomy worldliness.

Structure

The GTC is a nine-month intensive training program running annually from September 1 through May 31. Each spring, following a fall/winter application process, a cohort of four men will be admitted to the program to begin that September. (See "Annual Application Cycle" below.)

Cohort members will be expected to embrace the full range of service in the life of the church at various points throughout the year, including:

- Weekly preaching training labs
- Weekly discussion of major pastoral and theological works throughout church history
- Monthly preaching opportunities
- Discipling middle school, high school, and college students
- Serving children's Sunday School of various ages
- Serving alongside the deacons
- Observing multiple elder meetings
- Participating in monthly staff meetings of various kinds
- Hospital visitation
- Helping the preaching pastors prepare sermons
- Serving alongside various Sunday ministry teams
- Participating and serving in men's ministry

An operating principle in all this is: No man is prepared to preach and teach who is not prepared to mop and vacuum.
It is expected of every man that he is all in. Lackluster participation will not be acceptable. It is also expected of every man that he will fail at numerous points. That is good. Failure is healthy.

Once a week on Thursday afternoons, the cohort will come together with at least one NPC pastor to discuss what they have read that week and how it is leading them into deeper joy and fruitfulness in Christ.

Primary Training and Responsibilities

Christ-Centered Expository Preaching Training

Each week, the cohort will come together for two hours to learn and practice the basics of Christ-centered expository preaching. About once a month the residents will preach short sermons, followed by critical interaction, moderated and overseen by an NPC pastor. By God's grace, our aim is to train, practice, and grow to "do our best to present ourselves to God as one approved, workers who have no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Reading and Discussing Important Theological Works

Each week, the residents will enjoy some of the most crucial works of biblical, historical, systematic, and pastoral theology throughout church history. The cohort will then come together for two hours each week to discuss, rejoice in, and apply these books to our hearts and ministry. See below for list of books read throughout the program.

Roundtables with Church Leaders

Either through video conferencing or in-person visits, each cohort will spend time at least once a month interacting with fruitful and established church leaders such as professors of Christian colleges and seminaries, pastors of other churches, and leaders of ministries.

Summer Reading

During the summer before arriving, each resident will be required to read a few key books on themes that will set them up for maximum success as they "hit the ground running" in the 9-month program.

Honor Letters

Each month the resident is responsible for writing a one page "honor letter" that highlights specific Christ-like glory in another Christian at NPC. We are seeking to learn together how to "love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10).

Bible-Theology Project or Exam

Option 1: The resident conducts research and writing a 15-page paper on a particular area of interest, whether bible or theology. He will also present a 30-minute presentation to NPC pastors, elders, staff, family and friends at the very end of the program. The goal is to establish patterns of research and writing for ministry as well as deepen a man's understanding, enjoyment and grasp of a vital doctrine, theologian or biblical theme essential for life-long gospel ministry.
Option 2: Each resident may choose to substitute the research project for an intensive Bible and theological examination, including memorization of much of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* as well as short-answer essays on outlines of biblical books, major biblical themes, and general themes from the books read during the program. The exam is designed to help young men get a "jump start" on gaining experience with a typical ordination examination process in the PCA or similar denomination.

Retreat and Gospel Culture Immersion

At the very start of the program, the cohort will get away together to spend relaxed time building healthy and strong connections that will serve as a relational foundation throughout the year. At a mid-point in the year the men will get away together for several days to immerse themselves in a local church in the South with shared gospel culture values and to process together what they are learning, as well as rejoice in one another, and honor one another.

Cost and Financial Assistance

GTC is tuition-free. Moreover, every man admitted is provided with a stipend of $1,000/month to help with living expenses. All books will be provided by the church. Men may work outside the church to provide further support, though they should not work more than 15 hours per week for pay. (By God's grace, our aim is to increase the monthly stiped).

Seminary Advanced Credits

GTC is in the process of developing a partnership with various seminaries that are allowing the 9-month program to count for a handful of advanced course credit hours that would contribute to a future theological degree (M. Div., M.A.T.S., etc).

What (We Pray) This Program Feels Like

By God's grace and for his glory, our aim for each resident is that by receiving the truth of the gospel in the context of affectionate love (Phil. 1:7-8; 4:1), he would grow up into "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). This will mean that this program will be *intensely serious* and *seriously fun*. It will be filled with struggle, stretching, satisfaction, and sublime joy. Together we will deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow the good and gracious Lord, Shepherd, and Friend who laid his life down out of love for us (John 10:15; 15:13; 1 John 3:16).

FAQs

Is there any help from the church with regard to housing?

Yes. NPC leadership has secured housing close to the church. Single residents are encouraged to live together to foster depth of communal life and NPC is committed to helping with housing costs. In rare cases it may be preferable for men who are single to live in the home of an NPC family. The church will cover much (if not all) of the cost of housing.

Is there any help with regard to health insurance?

No. There is no health insurance since residents are not officially W-2 employees and are not full-time. However, the monthly stipend is not "earnings." Therefore, residents will not be paying income tax on the monthly stipend and no taxes will be taken out of it.

Who is this for?

The GTC is created to be a one-year gap period either immediately before or (less often) immediately after seminary. It can be a strategic year of development for any man of any age, however, including men involved in non-ministry vocations but wishing to serve more effectively in their local churches. It also works well as a year of healing for pastors who for any reason are in between ministries.

How intense is this?

Very. Every man admitted will be stretched in ways that will be deeply challenging. He will be squeezed spiritually, relationally, theologically, and practically. *Please note:* If you *do not* enjoy 15-17 hours weekly of reading and discussing deeper biblical and theological books, this program will not be a good fit for you.

Is it possible to fail?

Yes and no. The GTC Director retains the right to de-admit any man at any time. Reasons for such an action could include inconsistent participation, laziness, dishonesty, or breaking confidentiality. No man will be excused from the program for any sin he confesses unless it is a criminal offense; the whole point of the program is honesty about our sins and a brotherhood that provides safe ground to fight sin openly in the light rather than in the dark where it festers and grows.

Can it be done virtually or by distance to any degree?

No. This is an experience in the foxhole of life and ministry alongside other brothers, and must be done with physical, on-site presence. The GTC is run out of the conviction that hearts are formed and character is cultivated only with physical presence.

How much time can this be expected to take per week?

Residents should expect to devote approximately *35 hours per week* to this program. During some weeks, this may be slightly more or slightly less, depending on various circumstances and ministry commitments.

Leaders of GTC

Rev. Wade Urig serves as an associate pastor of Naperville Presbyterian Church and director of GTC. He served for several years in college ministry in a major university town in Iowa. Wade is a graduate of Wheaton College (BA) and Covenant Theological Seminary (MDiv). He and his wife, Claire, have two young sons.

Dr. Dane Ortlund serves as senior pastor of Naperville Presbyterian Church and founder of GTC. He earned an MDiv and ThM from Covenant Theological Seminary and a PhD in New Testament from Wheaton College. He is the author of several books and articles. He and his wife, Stacey, have five children.

Rev. Davy Chu serves as an associate pastor of Naperville Presbyterian Church. Davy has extensive ministry experience including many years of local church ministry in diverse contexts. After graduating from the University of North Carolina he earned an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and then served for several years with Cru in Asia. His wife, Pey, is a CCEF-trained counselor. Together they have four children.

Reading List for the Year

Every man will read through the whole Bible during the course of the 9-month program. In addition, each man is required to read a set of books with a weekly 2-3 page reading reflection for each book. These books will be provided by the church.

The books every man will read[1] are:

Biblical Theology

- Alexander, T. D. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*
- Beale, G. K. "The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology"
- Gaffin, Richard. *By Faith, Not by Sight*
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *According to Plan*

Historical

- Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*
- Augustine. *Confessions* and *Enchiridion* and *City of God*
- Bavinck, Herman. *Guidebook for Instruction in Christian Religion*
- Bunyan, John. Any treatise from Volume 1 of his Works
- Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*
- Chalmers, Thomas. "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection"
- Edwards, Jonathan. "The Excellency of Christ" and *End for Which God Created the World* and *Charity and Its Fruits*
- Flavel, John. *All Things New*
- Goodwin, Thomas. *The Heart of Christ* and *Christ Set Forth*
- Gregory the Great. *The Book of Pastoral Rule*
- Herbert, George. *Select Poems*
- Irenaeus. *On Apostolic Preaching*
- Luther, Martin. *The Freedom of the Christian* and *Galatians* commentary
- Macleod, Donald. *Christ Crucified*
- Newton, John. *Letters of John Newton*
- Owen, John. *Communion with God* and *The Glory of Christ*
- Packer, J. I. *Knowing God* and "What did the Cross Achieve?" and "Saved by His Precious Blood"
- Rutherford, Samuel. *Letters*
- Sibbes, Richard. *The Bruised Reed*
- Spurgeon, C. H. *Lectures to My Students* and *Christ's Glorious Achievements*
- Warfield, B. B. *"Imitating the Incarnation"*
- One of the following biographies: Roland Bainton on Martin Luther, Iain Murray on Jonathan Edwards, Arnold Dallimore on Charles Spurgeon, Tony Reinke on John Newton, or Arnold Dallimore on George Whitefield (concise version).

Christian Life and Ministry

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*
- Eswine, Zack. *The Imperfect Pastor*
- Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Whole Christ* and *Some Pastors and Teachers*
- Keller, Timothy. *Preaching* and *Prodigal God* and *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* and *Hope in Times of Fear*
- Lewis, C. S. *Screwtape Letters, The Great Divorce, Mere Christianity,* "The Weight of Glory", "Three Kinds of Men"
- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*
- Lovelace, Richard. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*
- Marshall, Colin and Tony Payne. *The Vine Project*
- Miller, Paul. *A Praying Life*
- Ortlund, Dane. *Gentle and Lowly* and *Finally Home*
- Ortlund, Ray. *The Gospel*
- Reeves, Michael. *Authentic Ministry* and *Delighting in the Trinity*
- Schaffer, Francis. "No Little People" and "The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way"
- Scrivener, Glen. *The Air We Breathe* and *How to Speak Life*

Creeds and Confessions

- Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian, Chalcedonian Definition
- Westminster Confession of Faith (or London Baptist Confession of 1689)
- Belgic Confession
- Heidelberg Catechism
- 39 Articles

[1] Reading list subject to change.

Theology Paper Topic Examples:

- A book of the Bible, such as the flow-of-thought of Romans
- A doctrine, such as the Trinity or regeneration or justification or inaugurated eschatology or covenant or Christ-centered hermeneutics (obscure doctrines will not be approved)
- A period of church history, such as the Reformation or the Age of the Puritans or the Great Awakening or the Princeton School
- A topical study of a theologian or pastor in church history, such as John Calvin on union with Christ or John Newton on gospel comfort for suffering Christians
- Cultural issues or political matters will not be approved. The GTC Director must approve of the chosen subject.

Theology Exam Question Examples:

- Outline the books of Isaiah and Romans.
- Trace the theme of covenant through the major moments in redemptive history.
- Define according to Westminster, with one Scripture proof: "What is God?" "How did God create man?" "What is sin?" "Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?" "What is Justification?"
- Define inaugurated eschatology with one application to Christian life and ministry.
- Who was John Calvin and what are three themes from his *Institutes* that ought to shape ministry today?
- What are two insights from Thomas Goodwin's *The Heart of Christ* that will shape how you spiritually care for a Christian who is discouraged about their sin?

Flow of Study

The first three weeks of each month are given to the study of one topic per week, with readings flowing into a Thursday afternoon discussion. At various points during the program the fourth week of the month is an "Open Study" week, for the residents to use as they wish, with no formal Thursday gathering.

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
• Gospel Doctrine, Gospel Culture • Communion with God • Preaching & Biblical Theology	• Prayer • The Glory of Christ • The Heart of Christ	• Affections of the Heart for Christ • The Heart of a Pastor I • The Heart of a Pastor II
DECEMBER	**JANUARY**	**FEBRUARY**
• Pre-Reformation Gospel Doctrine I • Pre-Reformation Gospel Doctrine II • Gospel-Culture Immersion Retreat	• Reformation & Luther • Reformation & Calvin • Reformation & Creeds	• Reformation & Modern Calvinism • Gospel & Law • Christ Crucified
MARCH	**APRIL**	**MAY**
• The Call to Ministry • Walking with God in Suffering • Inaugurated Eschatology	• Dynamics of the Christian Life • The Weight of Glory • Christ-Centered Evangelism	• Theology Exam / Project Study and Presentations

Annual Application Cycle

October–February – Public communication welcoming applications for following fall
March 1 – Applications due for those applying for that coming fall
February–March – Interviews with GTC Director and following up with personal references
March 15 – Applicants notified of admission decisions
April 1 – Admitted applicants confirm plans
End of August – Residents arrive in Naperville
September 1 – Program begins
May 31 – Program ends