

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship – Graduate Student Fellowship at the University of Alberta

When most people think about Christian ministry on a university campus, they imagine helping individual students encounter Jesus, find healing, and learn to follow him more faithfully—saving and healing the fish, so to speak. At the Graduate Student Fellowship at the University of Alberta, we celebrate these stories of transformation as students place their trust in Christ for the first time and grow as his disciples. Yet we also believe the gospel calls us to something even bigger. Jesus not only heals people within broken systems; he sends his people to participate in the healing of those systems themselves. As graduate students are formed into scholars, researchers, and future leaders, they are uniquely positioned to bring the reconciling wisdom, justice, and hope of Christ into the very waters they inhabit—working not only for transformed lives, but for a more faithful, humane, and flourishing academy.

This vision begins with prayer. Throughout the year, students gather regularly to pray for one another, for their departments and supervisors, for the University of Alberta, and for God's kingdom to be made visible on campus. We have been challenged to see ourselves as the watchmen of Isaiah 62, called to "give him no rest" until God's purposes are established. We seek to pray bold prayers that reflect God's heart for both people and institutions. One question we occasionally ask ourselves is this: How would the world change if every prayer you prayed this past week were answered? It is a challenging reminder that our prayers can easily become small and self-focused. In a culture that prizes self-sufficiency and achievement, prayer reminds us that the renewal of people and institutions is ultimately God's work. Our prayer meetings have become places of encouragement, dependence, and hope as students learn to entrust both their academic vocations and personal lives to Christ, believing that God is at work not only in individual hearts but also within the structures and cultures of the academy.

We are also formed through Scripture. Each week, graduate students come together to study God's Word carefully and thoughtfully, bringing the same intellectual curiosity they exercise in their research into conversation with the biblical text. We have reflected on the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah—a figure anointed by God's Spirit to bring justice to the nations, to be a light to the peoples, to suffer faithfully, and to proclaim good news to the poor. In Jesus, we see the fulfillment of these servant songs, and in following him we discover a vision for our own vocations. Together we wrestle with difficult questions, discover the richness of God's purposes, and seek to understand what faithful discipleship looks like within the unique opportunities and challenges of academic life. These studies continually remind us that Jesus is Lord not only of our private lives but also of our work, our scholarship, and our public witness.

Beyond formal gatherings, GSF is increasingly becoming family. Graduate studies can often be isolating, especially for students who are far from home, navigating new cultures, or carrying the pressures of demanding research programs. Through shared meals, social events, celebrations, and everyday friendships, students find a community where they are known, supported, and loved. What begins as a weekly meeting often grows into a network of relationships that sustains students through both the joys and challenges of graduate life. There are many stories that as staff, we hear months later—students walking home from bible study together, going on runs together, doing life together in intentional ways. It is so joyful to know this is happening without our input or prompting—it is the work of the Spirit of God to bring unity and deep, Christ-centred love.

This sense of family is deeply connected to our mission. As we learn to bear one another's burdens, celebrate one another's successes, and encourage one another in faith, we are being formed into a community that reflects the character of Christ. The servant portrayed in Isaiah embodies humility, perseverance, compassion, and obedience—qualities desperately needed within contemporary academic culture. The academy needs scholars who are marked not only by expertise, but also by wisdom, integrity, and a commitment to seek the flourishing of others. By God's grace, GSF seeks to be a place where these qualities are cultivated together.

We are grateful for all that God has done among us this year. We have seen students take meaningful steps toward Jesus, deepen their faith, discover community, and grow in their sense of calling. As we look ahead, we pray that God would continue to raise up graduate students who embody the faithful witness of Isaiah's watchmen and the servant-hearted mission of Christ. We seek to encourage students to see their academic work as part of God's redemptive purposes in the world. We pray that they would not only experience the healing and transforming power of the gospel themselves, but also carry that same healing and hope into the classrooms, laboratories, offices, and institutions where they have been sent. For God so loves their colleagues, supervisors, and the academy itself, He sends these Graduate Students so that Christ's love can save, heal and transform, bringing eternal life instead of perishing.