



# Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

FACILITATOR GUIDE



## Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

# Session 1: Distinctively Christian

### Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

#### (5 Minutes)

- Provide a copy of the participant's guide for each person in the study. (Electronic copies and the video may also be sent ahead of time to maximize the class discussion time).
- Copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* for each participant should also be available for the closing prayer.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or use this prayer:

*Loving God, we are grateful for our Wesleyan heritage and the blessings we receive through our faith tradition and through our local congregation. Be present with us during this time of learning and questioning, that our hearts and minds might be open to the power of your Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

### Session 1 Introduction and Video

#### (15 minutes)

In these words, or in your own words, say:

- "Today's presenter on our video is Kim Brannon. She will talk about Christianity and United Methodism.
- Ask, "What comes to mind for you as you reflect upon the video?" Be prepared to share something yourself if needed to get the group started.
- Give a few moments for the group to respond.

### The Root of Distinctively Christian

#### (15-20 minutes)

- In your own words, cover the talking points below:
  - Some of the ways United Methodists are the same as other Christian faith traditions are:
  - Belief in the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
  - Salvation as a gift of God rather than a result of human effort.
  - Christians, including United Methodists, are a part of one holy, universal Church.

- The Bible is at the core of our beliefs and practice.
- We are justified, or forgiven and restored, by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- We believe the life and teachings of Jesus to be relevant to us today.
- We believe the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of what it means to be Christian.

- Ask, "What are some additional things that United Methodism holds in common with Christians of other traditions?" Give time for the group to briefly respond. Possible responses may include the following: we gather to worship, we practice baptism and Holy Communion, we sing, we offer worship services of marriage and to celebrate the lives of those who have died, and we receive tithes and offerings.
- In these words, or in your own words, say "In our participant guide for Session 1, we learned that there are also ways in which The United Methodist Church is distinct from some other Christian traditions. We have a strong grounding in a theology of grace. We are doctrinal rather than dogmatic. We allow for interpretation of scripture in context with experience, tradition and reason."
- "How we understand scripture, our understanding of salvation as a process rather than an event, our emphasis on social holiness, and the concept of sanctification (growing into becoming more like Christ as a part of our salvation process) will be covered in the upcoming sessions, along with more ways in which United Methodism is distinct."
- "In this session, we are focusing on the concept of grace. The author describes grace as 'the undeserved, unreserved, all-encompassing love that God has for human beings, both collectively and individually.'"

# Wesleyan Roots Session 1: Distinctively Christian

## Scriptures of the Day: Psalm 103:8-13

- Say: "Our scripture is Psalm 103:8-13. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage below.

*The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
He will not always accuse,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far, he removes our transgressions from us.  
As a father has compassion for his children,  
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him*<sup>1</sup>

## Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion: (10 minutes)

- In these words, or in your own words, say, "The Psalmist is expressing joy for God's abundant grace. Think about a time when God has been merciful and gracious to you. Perhaps it was a time in which you felt especially close to God, or maybe it was a time in which you were experiencing grief or loss. Turn to your partner and briefly describe your experience of grace."
- Be sure everyone has a partner. If anyone is on their own, be prepared to step in to be their partner.
- After a few minutes, invite everyone back into the larger group.
- Then say, "The author states that grace is one of the aspects of faith shared with other Christian traditions, but at the same time she distinguishes it as the most

outstanding characteristic of our faith and practice as United Methodists and describes it as our 'biggest Wesleyan root.'"

- Ask "In what ways would you say grace is experienced differently within The United Methodist tradition than in some other Christian faith traditions?"
- Give some time for the class to respond. If needed, you might prompt their responses with your own response.
- "The author starts by describing a time when a classmate gave her a difficult time because she was United Methodist. Has anyone ever 'called you out' for your United Methodist beliefs and practices? How did you respond? How might you respond if this happened to you now?"
- Give time for the class to respond.

## United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Affirmation of Faith (5 minutes)

- In these or similar words, say, "Session 2 is all about how grace is greater than our fear. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to us getting together next week. Before our closing prayer for every session, we will review the Wesleyan Identity Points in the box at the bottom of your session guide. Session 1 has three identity points. Let's read these out loud together."
- "Let us join in prayer. Turn to page 895 in the back of your hymnal. . . Let's pray the Lord's prayer together.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not  
into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the  
kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

Marsha Engle Middleton

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## United Methodist Identity Points:

- United Methodists share a great deal in common with Christians of other denominations, such as belief in the Holy Trinity, salvation as a gift of God rather than a result of human effort, one universal Church, the biblical witness as core of our faith, and justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and more.
- United Methodists have some distinctive emphases that are rooted in our Wesleyan tradition, such as an emphasis on grace, our understanding of scripture, an emphasis on social holiness, the concept of entire sanctification, and more.
- Grace is the undeserved, unreserved, all-encompassing love that God has for humanity and all creation, both individually and collectively.

1 Unless otherwise noted, scripture in Wesleyan Roots is taken from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, © Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. 1989, 1995. All rights reserved.