



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

FACILITATOR GUIDE



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 2: Grace > Fear

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 2 Participant Guide with them. Provide a copy for any participants who did not bring their own.
- Also provide a copy of *The United Methodist Hymnal* for each participant to use in reciting the creed later in the session. Please do not assume that everyone will have memorized the creeds, which may be familiar to you.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this prayer from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*:

Prayer for Wisdom

*O Wisdom on High, by you the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly. Grant us, in all doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us do, that we may be saved from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*¹

Session 2 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

- In these words, or in your own words, say: "Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Derek Jacobs. He will talk about God being a God of grace."
- Show the video.
- Ask, "What did this video bring to mind for you?" 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 Grace > Fear

(15-20 minutes)

- In these words, or in your own words, say "Session 2 of Wesleyan Roots delves more into God's grace, especially God's prevenient grace, or the grace that goes before us.

- "The author begins by describing how she used to be afraid of God as a child. She was under the impression that God was angry and mean."
- Ask: "Has anyone here ever been afraid of God or what some call 'God's wrath'?"
- As participants respond, ask, "How do you think you received that understanding of God?"
- Allow time for response as you keep your eye on the time allotted for this session.

Scriptures of the Day: Isaiah 49:1-6 and Romans 5:6-8

- Say: "Our first scripture is Isaiah 49:1-6. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage below.

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

- Say in these or your own words: "The prophet Isaiah was called from before birth to be loved by God and to serve God. He states that God even gave him his name."

¹ *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. #525

Wesleyan Roots Session 2: Grace > Fear

- Ask: How does it make you feel when you consider that God knows us so intimately, even before our birth?
- Give the group a chance to briefly respond.
- Say, "Our second scripture is Romans 5:6–8. Here now the word of God:"
- Read the passage below.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

- In these words, or in your own words, say "In our Participant's Guide for Session 2, we learned that some other Christian traditions believe that God is angry with every person from the point of birth to the point at which they pray inviting Jesus Christ to be their personal Lord and Savior. The thought is that God is angry because of the original sin we inherited from those who came before us.
- United Methodists still believe in original sin, but in a different way. We believe there is still a "divine spark" of God's own image within every human being despite original sin.
- Another way in which Wesleyan Christians like United Methodists are distinct is that we do not believe God is angry with us from the start. We do believe God can be disappointed in us, just as a parent is disappointed with their children from time to time; however, God loves us. God loves us from before our birth, even before we have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- Wesleyan Christians including United Methodists call this kind of love "prevenient grace," which literally means "the grace that goes before us." Prevenient grace is a significant Wesleyan root."

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion: (10 minutes)

- The author wrote about how she was afraid of God as a child, but she imagines God very differently now. How do you tend to envision God at your current stage of life?
- To what degree do you think people's fear of God's wrath interferes with them being open to a relationship with God? To what degree do you think that fear limits their interactions with the church?

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

- In these words, or in your own words, say, "Session 3 is all about our initiation into the Body of Christ through baptism, and we will be looking at ways that baptism is distinct within United Methodism. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to us getting together next week. Let us review the Wesleyan Identity Points in the box at the bottom of your session guide. Session 2 has two identity points. Let's read these out loud together."
- Turn to #887 in the back of your hymnal. . . Join me in reciting our Affirmation of Faith from Romans 8:35, 37-39.

Leader: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness or peril or sword?

People: No! In all things we are more than conquerors through the One who loved us. We are sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- We are motivated to follow Jesus Christ because we embrace God's love, not because we fear God's wrath.
- Prevenient grace is God's amazing, all-encompassing love that precedes us in our lives from before our births. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, prevenient grace not only goes before us, but brings us along our path of salvation and restores us.