



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

FACILITATOR GUIDE



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 10: Spiritual Practices for Soul-Hungry Christians

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 10 Participants' 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 during the closing liturgy.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this prayer.

Merciful God, in times that feel like light to us, give us thankful hearts. In times that feel like darkness to us, give us memories of your faithfulness. In all times, empower us to turn toward you in obedient devotion, for you are our God, our creator. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Session 10 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

- "In these words, or in your own words, say: "Today's presenter on our video is Jeff Bouis. He will talk about the spiritual practices for Wesleyan Christians, and how can grow closer to God through works of piety."
- 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.

Scriptures of the Day: Matthew 6:1-18

(15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our first scripture for Session 10 is Matthew 6: 1-18. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage.

Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So whenever you give alms,

do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

- Say: "In this passage Jesus draws a distinction between spiritual practices, or acts of piety, that are honest and authentic and those that are done to impress others. There are at least two ways in which Christians can place obstacles in the path of their spiritual practice."

Wesleyan Roots Session 10: Spiritual Practices for Soul-Hungry Christians

- Say, “First, there are those whom Jesus seems to be addressing in this passage. These are folks who tend to pray using fancy language, or who want others to know how much money they contribute to the church, or who seek to impress others with their religiosity in other ways. Clearly Jesus encouraged his followers to pray, he believed in paying the temple tax and giving alms (making financial contributions to benefit those in need), and he encouraged folks to incorporate all the aspects of faithful living into their daily lives. This passage serves as a warning to those who approach God more like the Pharisee of Jesus’ parable in Luke 18:9–14 (see Session 10’s participants’ guide) than the tax collector of that same parable.”
- “Secondly, there are those who do not dare approach God at all, even though they believe in God and may even desire a relationship with God. Perhaps they feel too unworthy to approach God (see session 2: “Grace > Fear”). Remember Luke 18:9–14? “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” God does not expect us to be without faults; even in our human condition, God longs for a real relationship with us just as any good parent longs for a relationship with his or her children. All of us—all people just like you and me—are encouraged to confess our sinfulness and our shortcomings, and to be honest before God.”
- Ask: “Have you ever hesitated to approach God due to a sense of your sinfulness or your human shortcomings? Were you able to arrive a place where you could be honest before God?”
- Ask: “Without answering out loud, consider if you, or someone you have known, ever behaved more like the Pharisee in Luke 18 than the tax collector? Have you ever sensed that someone was praying with extra fancy words, or bragging about their giving to the church in order to impress other people more than God? What kind of growth do you think God longs to see in these people? How do you think God is calling you to grow?”
- Say: “Another common obstacle to spiritual practice occurs when a person would like to study the Bible in a group such as a Sunday School class or small group study, but they choose not to do so because they think they should know more about the Bible than they do. Perhaps they fear being embarrassed in front of others because of a word they cannot pronounce, because they do not know where a book is located in the Bible, or because they experience the condition of dyslexia and are not comfortable reading in public.
- The author of Wesleyan Roots, Marsha Engle Middleton, indicates that it is extremely common for even long-time Christians to feel uncomfortable participating in a class or a group. For example, she says there are those who are uncomfortable praying by themselves in public. They may fear being called on to give an opening or a closing prayer in a class. Pastor Marsha reminds us that one of the blessings of The United Methodist Church is that we are all encouraged to ask questions. God is honored by our efforts to study, whether we are beginners or full-fledged biblical scholars. Additionally, she encourages class teachers and facilitators never to ask someone to pray aloud without speaking to them about it first to make certain they are comfortable doing so. Her advice is, if you are ever asked to read or pray aloud and you prefer not to do so, to simply say something like, “I would prefer not to read today,” or “I would rather someone else pray this morning.” Once again, our focus should be on authenticity.
- Ask: “Have you ever hesitated to be part of a Bible study or Sunday School class because you did not think you knew enough about the Bible to participate, or feared embarrassment? What could have been done to increase your comfort level?”

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- Have you ever been desperate for God’s presence, perhaps due to a crisis in your life? How did you let God know about your need?
- How might God be calling you to move toward acts of piety such as prayer, studying scripture, or an accountability group? Which one of these might you begin practicing first? What would be your first step in getting started?
- How do you think God works through a group of people who are all practicing spiritual disciplines together?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, “Session 11 is about how we are called to teach and learn within our congregation. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to next week. Let us review the United Methodist Identity Points from Session 10 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has four identity points. Let’s read these out loud together.”
- “Please turn in your hymnals to #451 and let us read together the words of the hymn, “Be Thou My Vision.”

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Acts of piety are spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, studying scripture, and fasting, that allow us to grow in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit uses activities like these in our journey toward sanctification.
- Spiritual disciplines are means of grace that strengthen our relationship with God and lead us into a life of following Jesus Christ.
- The daily examen is one spiritual discipline through which Christians can strengthen their relationship with God.