



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

FACILITATOR GUIDE



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 4: Free Will vs. Determinism

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 4 Participants' Guide with them. Provide a copy for any participants who did not bring their own.
- Also provide a copy of the Lord's Prayer for each participant to use during the closing prayer. Three different versions of the Lord's Prayer are included in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #894–#896. Use the version with which your class is most familiar.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this prayer, adapted from *The Book of Common Prayer*, 2018 edition, p. 814.

O heavenly God, who has filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Session 4 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

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

- "Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Edgar Bazan. He will talk about determinism and free will."
- 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.

Scripture of the Day: Luke 13:1-5

(15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our scripture for Session 4 is Luke 13:1–5. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage below.

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these

Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

- In these, or your own words, say: "In this passage, Jesus was asked a question about tragedy, 'Jesus, why do bad things happen to good people?' In this case, we learn that some of the Jewish population in Galilee were reported to have been killed by the Romans when they came to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices to God. Those questioning Jesus seem to be wondering if their deaths occurred as a punishment from God."
- Ask: "Do you think God judges people by causing them to be injured or killed? Why do you believe the way you do about this topic?"
- Say: "Jesus said that was not what was going on in this situation. In verses 2-3, Jesus asked a question and then answered it. 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you...'"
- Say: "In verse 4, Jesus mentions another sad incident – this time an accident during which eighteen people were killed when a tower collapsed and fell on them. Jesus said, 'Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you...'"
- Say, "Yet in both scenarios, the deaths of Galileans and the ones killed by the tower, Jesus added important caveats. In verse 3 he warned, 'But unless you repent you will all perish as they (the Galileans) did.' And in verse 5, '...unless you repent, you will all perish just as they (the eighteen) did.'"
- Ask: "What was Jesus warning them about in these verses? How does this passage speak to the issues of determinism versus free will?"

Wesleyan Roots Session 4: Free Will vs. Determinism

Gods' Design and Our Response

- For further study, read Ephesians 1:3-14. In this passage, we read about how human beings are “destined according to the purposes of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.” The notes in the Wesley Study Bible on this passage say that “they were not predestined to believe, but rather, as believers, God had a wonderful design for them in Christ as part of God’s overall purpose to unite the whole creation under a singular headship of Christ.”¹
- What is the difference between being predestined to believe and believers following what was designed for them in Christ? How does this speak to the concept of “free will?”
- The Ephesians passage speaks of redemption for God’s people. When have you experienced God’s redeeming work coming out of difficult circumstances?

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- Do you think God has ever influenced you as you made an important life decision? When? Do you think there is a difference between God influencing you by the power of the Holy Spirit and God coercing you into behaving in a certain way?

- One of the most powerful images of God is that of a divine Parent. Just like a good parent, God wants a loving relationship with us, but God will not force it upon us. Do you think there is anything we could do that could cause God, or divine Parent, to stop loving us? Why or why not?
- Sometimes parents set strong boundaries with their children, and this can mean that a young person has to face the consequences of his or her actions. Do you think God as our divine Parent might allow us to face the consequences of our actions? Why or why not?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, “Session 5 is about how United Methodists understand and interpret scripture. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to us getting together next week. Let us review the United Methodist Identity Points from Session 4 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has five identity points. Let’s read these out loud together.”
- Then say, “Let us close by praying the Lord’s prayer together. ‘Our Father...’”

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- We believe God chooses to exercise power in such a way as to allow humans to have genuine free will.
- Free will is a gift given by God so that we might have real relationships with God and one another.
- United Methodists do not believe that God has predetermined our salvation or the details of our lives.
- We believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for every human being, and we have an opportunity to respond to Jesus’ offer of a real relationship by virtue of our free will.
- We believe that free will requires faithful responsibility.

¹ *The NRSV Wesley Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009. Notes section on Ephesians 1: 3 – 14, p. 1432.