



INTRODUCTION

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Introduction to Wesleyan Roots

Why Recall Our Wesleyan Roots?

Welcome to the Wesleyan Roots Study!

A quick look at your closest Christian bookstore or online can provide you with a myriad of resources for your local congregation, your Sunday School class, or your small group. Our congregations are made up of people with busy schedules, and learning opportunities are brief, with many lasting under an hour. With all the options available to us, why do we need a new resource for recalling our Wesleyan roots

As a United Methodist pastor for more than thirty years, when I was first appointed to a new congregation, I would ask folks several questions so I could begin getting to know them:

- Why are you Christian?
- Why are you United Methodist?
- Why are you part of this congregation?

I learned a great deal by asking these questions, and it is partly out of my experience that this study arises. Most people have a pretty good idea of the reasons why they are a part of their local church. The people are friendly, it is conveniently located, or “I grew up in this church” are all common answers. Many people can articulate why they are Christian as opposed to non-believers, and some can even articulate why they are Christian as opposed to being adherents of another religion altogether. What many struggle with, though, is *why they are United Methodist*. in particular.

I Would Often Hear...

- “I was Baptist and my spouse grew up Roman Catholic, so the United Methodist Church seemed like a good middle ground.”
- “I grew up in a non-denominational church, but they required my spouse to be rebaptized to join the church and he would not do it, so we looked around until we found a church that felt right to us.”

- My kids came to Vacation Bible School and eventually became a part of the youth group. I had never really gone to church, but I would come occasionally to watch my children sing or something. People were nice, so eventually decided I would make this my church home.”
- “I was raised a Methodist. I did attend other churches for a while to see what else was out there, but I was more comfortable with what I knew.”
- “After my divorce, it became clear that my previous church was not comfortable with me being there. I mentioned to coworkers that I was going to be leaving my church due to the divorce, and someone said I should try out a United Methodist Church. I did and it stuck.”
- “I noticed that United Methodists were leaders in the community. They were always the first to volunteer and seemed to care about making the world a better place. I want to be part of a church like that.”

These are all legitimate answers to the question, and these answers point us to the reason why it is a good idea to recall our Wesleyan heritage. Some of us have lost touch with the things that make the United Methodist Church unique among Christian denominations, some of us never learned just what those things were to begin with, and some of us have fallen into the habit of taking the UMC for granted. We forget not every church is fully welcoming to those who are divorced, has an “open” communion table, or can handle the pressure when someone disagrees with a point or two in a pastor’s sermon. Not every church allows folks to ask sincere questions, and not every church deals openly with ambiguity, which can certainly be present in the midst of an individual’s faith.

Why Recall Our Wesleyan Roots?

This study is for you if ...

- You were born into the United Methodist Church or its predecessor denominations of the Methodist Church or Evangelical United Brethren.
- You became a part of the United Methodist Church as a youth or adult.
- You are new to the United Methodist Church or are considering becoming a part of a UM congregation.
- You have ever wondered how the United Methodist Church differs from other Christian denominations.
- You have heard derogatory things about the United Methodist Church and wonder what it “brings to the table” of Christianity and whether it is for you or not.
- You have been challenged because you are United Methodist and would like to articulate more clearly the distinctive strengths of your faith tradition.
- You have previously learned about the Wesleyan roots of Methodism, but it has been a while, or you never had that opportunity.
- You're not sure what “Wesleyan” means.

What Can You Expect from Wesleyan Roots?

Wesleyan Roots consists of 12 sessions designed to last from 40 to 50 minutes each. The sessions are divided into three units. Unit One reminds us of God's abundant grace for us and identifies grace as the heart of Wesleyan Christianity. Unit Two is all about how we understand the nature and action of God. We explore the tools and ways that we can see God's action and make meaning of who God is in the world. Finally, Unit Three is about helping us to live Christ-like lives, growing in love with God, and others.

Each session consists of a brief video introducing the concept for that session. Participants in your group will receive a document with information about the session's topic conveyed in a compelling way. Group facilitators are encouraged to distribute this document at least a couple of days prior to the class meeting so it can be read by group members individually. Facilitators will also receive a page of instructions and resources for each session, including a timeline, opening and closing prayers, discussion questions, and scripture to accompany the session. A Wesleyan Roots Resource Guide is also available for facilitators, clergy, and

lay participants with rich suggestions as to how the material may be used in your context.

United Methodist Identity

Each session is summarized with several United Methodist Identity Points. These statements, taken both individually and collectively, go a long way in articulating what makes United Methodists distinct from other Christian traditions.

Two Caveats Before We Begin

Before we jump in to the first session, let me clarify two things. First, I want to name who I am and how that may impact my perspective. I am a “middle-aged-ish,” white, educated woman living in the southern part of the United States. These factors influence the perspective with which I see the world and the lenses through which I understand the Christian faith. I am an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and carry the responsibilities for preaching the Word, administering the Sacraments, ordering the life of the church, and serving others in the name of Jesus Christ. This has also influenced my perspective. We may have a great deal in common, or it may be that we have few things in common. Regardless, I respect you, your history and heritage, and the unique perspectives you bring to the table in this discussion of Wesleyan roots.

Secondly, by its very nature this study has a comparative element to it. That means that at points I will name, in a general way, how Christians with Wesleyan roots may differ from Christians who are part of other denominations. Please know that while I clearly prefer my United Methodist perspective, I absolutely respect all faith traditions. When I talk about some other denominations, I do so with broad strokes and generalized language. This is not to disparage others, but to help those of us within, or interested in joining, the United Methodist Church understand the distinctive nature of Wesleyan Christianity.

Most Relevant Presentation of the Gospel Today?

It is my conviction that the United Methodist presentation of the gospel is the most relevant presentation for many people in our complex, 21st century world. Even for those who think Christianity has nothing to offer them, the United Methodist perspective on what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ can and does prove to be positively transformative, enriching people's lives with purpose, meaning, and hope. Best wishes on your journey!

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