



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!

Marsha Engle Middleton



RESOURCE GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Resource Guide for Wesleyan Roots

Want to Learn More?

As you begin to learn more about our Wesleyan Roots in the United Methodist Church, you may find yourself wanting to explore further. For example, you might want to learn how you can use what you have learned to better serve students in the student ministry of your local congregation. Or perhaps you came from a non-Methodist Christian tradition and are fascinated by the differences in what you learned about baptism from your previous denomination and what United Methodists believe. Maybe you are clergy and find yourself intrigued by a point of Wesleyan doctrine that has not previously caught your attention. Or perhaps you serve in an area with pastors who profess Calvinistic Christian thought and you would like to better understand their theological stance. Regardless of your specific interests, a plethora of good material exists to assist you in your quest. Some of it is listed here. It is my hope and prayer that you might grow in grace and wisdom as you are perfected in love by the Holy Spirit.

Marsha Engle Middleton

Resources for Those “Wading In” to Wesleyan Studies:

Abraham, William J. *Wesley for Armchair Theologians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

- Lest anyone think that Professor Abraham had no sense of humor, check out the Wesleyan installment in a fine book series examining Christian faith traditions from A to Z. Easy, delightful read, backed up by legitimate scholarship.

Campbell, Ted. A. *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials (Revised Edition)*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011.

- This book surveys the historic teachings of four Methodist denominations including The United Methodist Church. Campbell's annotations in the margins of the book make it easy to use, and the bibliography and glossary alone make it worth the read.

- Note: Professor Campbell has graciously offered to Wesleyan Roots participants and facilitators access to a number of print, audio, and video resources located on his webpage: <https://tedcampbell.com/united-methodist-basics-downloads/>
- I encourage you to explore the rich content of a generous United Methodist scholar who loves local congregations.

Heath, Elaine A. *Five Means of Grace: Experience God's Love the Wesleyan Way*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017

- A beautiful little book covering five means of grace, including prayer, searching the scriptures, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian conferencing.

Job, Ruben P. *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, illustrated edition, 2007.

Joyner, Jr. F. Belton. *Being United Methodist in the Bible Belt: A Theological Survival Guide for youth, Parents, and Other Confused United Methodists*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

- Practical and accessible, this is a good read whether you live in the “Bible Belt” or not.

The Wesley Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press. New Revised Standard Version: 2009. Common English Bible Version: 2012.

- This is a great study Bible overall, and it is especially helpful for Wesleyan Christians as it defines terms and presents information on a large number of Wesleyan concepts.

Willimon, William H. *This We Believe: The Core of Wesleyan Faith and Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010

- Designed as an accompaniment to The Wesley Study Bible, this accessible book can be used for group or individual study.

Resource Guide for Wesleyan Roots

Books for Those “Diving Deeply” into Wesleyan Studies:

Abraham, William J. and James E. Kirby, editors. *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- This is a reference work that includes articles from scholars like Jim Kirby, Ted Campbell, Geoffrey Wainwright, Elaine Heath, Kenneth Collins, Sarah Heaner Lancaster, Marjorie Suchocki, William Abraham, Harold Recinos, and Robin Lovin. It is rich in content and a good investment for those wanting a deeper dive.

Carter, Jr. Kenneth H. *Embracing the Wideness: The Shared Convictions of The United Methodist Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018.

- This highly readable volume is Bishop Carter’s proposal of a way forward among different convictions as United Methodists met for General Conference 2018. It is still worth a read even after the fact.

Campbell, Ted A. *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of The Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, Kingswood Books, 2010.

- Note Campbell’s emphasis on Wesleyan communities and how they have interpreted Wesleyan beliefs for themselves. I especially liked Chapter 4, “Beliefs about the ‘Way of Salvation’ After the Wesleys,” and Chapter 7, “Fourteen Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities.”
- Note: Professor Campbell has graciously offered Wesleyan Roots participants and facilitators access to a number of print, audio, and video resources located on his webpage. <https://tedcampbell.com/united-methodist-basics-downloads/>
- I encourage you to explore the rich content of a generous United Methodist scholar who loves local congregations.

Rieger, Joerg. *Grace Under Pressure: Negotiating the Heart of the Methodist Traditions*. Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2011.

- This thin book poses some huge challenges to the UMC as it calls us back to grace so much at the heart of our history and tradition. It deals with tough issues like capitalism and imperialism, making use of Rieger’s precise language to highlight what is at stake for the church.

Thorsen, Don. *Calvin vs Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013.

- This rich work should be mandatory reading for United Methodist clergy serving in communities characterized by Calvinistic mores. If you only read one book from this list, please read this one.

Original Source Material:

Felton, Gayle Carlton. *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, Revised 2008.

- Available at the North Texas Conference website at www.ntcumc.org or through Discipleship Resources of the United Methodist Church at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/by-water-and-the-spirit-full-text>. Available in paperback and via Kindle as well.
- This is the official statement on baptism by the United Methodist Church, adopted at General Conference 1996.

Felton, Gayle Carlton. *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005. Available through the UMC Discipleship website.

- <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/this-holy-mystery-a-united-methodist-understanding-of-holy-communion>
- This is the official statement on Holy Communion of the United Methodist Church, adopted by General Conference 2004.

Outler, Albert C. *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1974.

- This is a thin, dense, highly important book for Wesleyan clergy to read. It is based on the Fondren Lectures at SMU in 1974. Available via Amazon, at some used bookstores, and at larger libraries.

John Wesley’s Sermons:

Campbell, Ted A. editor. *A Wesley Reader: Writings of John and Charles Wesley*. Dallas: Tuckapaw Media, 2008.

- This abbreviated anthology of Wesleyan material contains good samples of both John and Charles’ writings.

Outler, Albert C. and Richard P. Heitzenrater editors. *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.

- This classic anthology is still available in paperback or via Kindle.

John Wesley’s sermons are also available online at several locations. The Museum of Methodism & John Wesley’s House in London provides one such website at <https://www.wesleysheritage.org.uk/exhibits/john-wesleys-sermons/browse-sermons/>

Resources Guide for Wesleyan Roots

John Wesley's Sermons to Accompany Wesleyan Roots Sessions:

Session 1: Distinctively Christian... "Catholic Spirit" #39

Session 2: Grace > Fear... "The Scripture Way of Salvation" #43 and "On Sin in Believers" #13

Session 3: Our Baptismal Covenant... "The Means of Grace" #16

Session 4: Did God Do That? The Dangers of Determinism... "On Divine Providence" #67

Session 5: Reading Glasses: Scripture in Light of Tradition, Experience, and Reason ... "The Witness of the Spirit" #10 and #11

Session 6: Salvation as More of a Journey-in-Progress than an Event ... "The Repentance of Believers" #14 and "Christian Perfection" #40

Session 7: Diverse by Design... "Thoughts upon Slavery"

- Note that this is from a tract by John Wesley and not a sermon). At the time of Wesleyan Roots' publication, it is available as a PDF online, as a paperback, or via Kindle.

Session 8: Meeting God at the Table... "The Duty of Constant Communion" #101

Session 9: Social Holiness in Uncertain Times... "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" #23 and #24

Session 10: Spiritual Practices for Soul Hungry Christians . . . "The Good Steward" #51

Session 11: Teaching and Learning in the UM Spirit . . . "On the Education of Children" #95

- Note: "Education from a Methodist Perspective" is a secondary source article available on the website of The Methodist Church in Britain. Search at <https://www.methodist.org.uk>

Session 12: God is Not Finished Yet: Living and Leading with Hope in Uncertain Times . . . "The Way of the Kingdom" #7

Resource Guide for Wesleyan Roots

Models for Group Facilitation

There are many ways to engage any curriculum. Here are some examples of implementation to help inspire your plan. Think about the members of your group. Would they want more time for discussion in person and be willing to do prep work at home? Would they prefer to be able to just show up and fully participate? Will people attend consistently or drop in and drop out across the 12 sessions? In any model you choose, we recommend the facilitator review all the materials for their session in their own preparation work to lead.

Model 1: Rooted in Discussion Model:

- Distribute video link and participant guide several days before the session
- Participant pre-work, 15 minutes:
 - Watch Video
 - Read Participant Guide
 - Make any initial notes or responses to questions
- Session (*follow Facilitator Guide, but skip the video*)
 - Gathering & Prayer
 - The Root of... (Session Content overview)
 - Scripture
 - Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful discussion
 - United Methodist Identity Points
 - Closing Prayer

Model 2: Rooted in Presence:

- Provide copies of the Participant Guide as people enter
- Follow the Facilitator's Guide for the session
- Assume that no one has read the Participant Guide prior to discussion

Model 3: The Open Roots Model:

- Gathering and Prayer
- Briefly Summarize today's topic
- Open ended Questions instead of the video
- One open ended question to ponder in the coming week
- United Methodist Identity Points
- Closing Prayer

Model 4: The Deep Roots Model:

Spread out the sessions so that you stay with the same Session topic for more than one week. Engage Resource Guide materials (above) to choose supplemental content for additional weeks spent on one Session topic.

- Wesleyan Roots for the whole year:
 - 12 sessions – one per month
 - First session of each month follows Model 1. The remaining Sundays of that month engage Resource Guide for additional content.
- Wesleyan Roots for 24 weeks:
 - 12 sessions – one every other week. One week follows Model 1, the next week engages content from the Resource Guide, then the next week moves on to the next session, etc



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



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*¹

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

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.



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 1: Distinctively Christian

Why United Methodists Are Not "Baptist Light"

When I was in middle school, a classmate who was part of another church in my small town would harass me about being United Methodist. He would say, "Yeah... I saw you Methodists had a lot of cars in the parking lot Sunday. You must have been having hamburgers after church. You Methodists just come to church for social hour and food." Or "You Methodists don't really believe in anything." Or "You Methodists believe everything." At the time, I absolutely knew that none of those things were true. First, we hardly ever ate hamburgers, although we were experts at the potluck dinner. Secondly, and more importantly, we United Methodists do indeed embrace specific beliefs of faith and practice. Although I did not have language to articulate it at the time, I realized that the United Methodist tradition in which I was raised had solid doctrine, or teachings, that had been handed down to me from the deepest roots of early Christianity. I also sensed that some of the teachings from my classmate's denomination were lived out in a more inflexible context. Perhaps that is why a person from the Baptist tradition might think hamburgers were required to persuade Methodists to come to church. In this case, whereas my classmate's tradition as lived out in his particular local church seemed to focus more on the enforcement of specific behavior, my tradition seemed to focus more on God's love.

When I began to pastor congregations in the United Methodist Church, I discovered that my classmate's misconception was also present in the congregations I served. A number of members, many of whom originated from other denominations, had the impression that United Methodism was mostly like the Baptist Church but not as strict. I overheard a man in one of my congregations describe to a friend that being United Methodist was like being "Baptist Light." According to him, United Methodists could "drink and dance" while Baptists could not. As my stomach turned and my head began to ache, I was brought front and center with the reality that I had a lot of work to do.

Our Shared Beliefs

Certainly United Methodists, like the Wesleyan Christians before them, continue to share many beliefs in common with other Christian traditions. For example, we believe in the Holy Trinity: in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We believe in the mystery of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. We believe in one holy and universal Church of which we are but a part, in the present and coming Reign of God, in the authority of scripture in matters of faith, in our justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And we believe in grace, which is a belief we also share with other Christians.

As a matter of fact, grace is a big word for Christians who are rooted in the Wesleyan tradition. **Grace** does not refer to a prayer one offers before a meal, but instead is the undeserved, unreserved, all-encompassing love that God has for human beings, both collectively and individually. We believe grace is fundamental to God's very nature, and that it truly is amazing. For us, grace is not merely a part of the way God acts in the world; instead, grace is present through God's creation of and relationship with human beings and the created order. The Wesleyan emphasis on grace is so significant that it can be described as the most outstanding characteristic of our faith and practice. Grace is more than a piece of our Wesleyan tradition. Indeed, it permeates every part of who we are.

We read in Ephesians 2: 8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."¹

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

Our understanding of God's grace is one of the distinctive beliefs that come from our Wesleyan tradition. It is a big "root" for us – probably the biggest of all the Wesleyan roots. There are other distinctive beliefs as well, and we will learn more about many of them as this study progresses.

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.

Wesleyan Roots Session 1: Distinctively Christian

Another way in which the United Methodist Church is different than some other Christian traditions is that there is no “litmus test” needed to become a member. Some denominational and non-denominational Christian groups require new members to sign a statement pledging that they believe a specific set of Christian teachings. United Methodist do not require this. We do make specific promises regarding baptism and church membership, and we do take these promises seriously. We are a doctrinal denomination. Doctrine in this context refers to the teachings of the Church that, in the case of the UMC, have been handed down to us from scripture and tradition, including the perspectives of John and Charles Wesley, as well as many women and men of the United Methodist movement.² Some Christian traditions profess points of belief and practice that are somewhat more inflexible when compared to the belief and practices of Wesleyan Christians as a whole. For example, some denominations require that persons who receive Holy Communion be members of that particular congregation.

In the Wesleyan tradition, Holy Communion is offered to everyone. While the United Methodist Church ascribes firmly to beliefs deemed essential (such as the Trinity and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) we are more flexible in allowing interpretation of how doctrine is taught and practiced. We will cover this more in the session entitled “Diverse by Design: Companions on the Journey.”

Little did I know at the time, but what my classmate intended as an insult turned out to be a great blessing for me and has shaped most of my preaching and teaching over the years. May you be blessed in your continued journey through Wesleyan Roots.

Marsha Engle Middleton

2 You can learn more about it in ¶102 in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, especially in the sections entitled “Our Common Heritage as Christians,” “and “Basic Christian Affirmations.”

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, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and sanctification, among others.
- 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. Wesleyan Roots will cover a number of these over the next eleven sessions.
- Grace is the undeserved, unreserved, all-encompassing love that God has for humanity and all creation, both collectively and individually.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- In what ways does the United Methodist Church seem like other Christian denominations? In what ways does it seem different?
- If you are United Methodist, has anyone from another Christian tradition ever “called you out” for your Methodist beliefs and practices? How did you respond, or how might you respond if this happened to you?
- Describe a time when God’s grace was evident to you. What did you learn about God from this experience? What did you learn about yourself?



FACILITATOR GUIDE

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What Makes United Methodism Distinct



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.



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 2: Grace > Fear

The Fear of God

Perhaps when you were young you encountered an angry adult such as a parent, teacher, or coach who responded to an infraction on your part by loudly declaring something like "I'll put the fear of God into you!" In my memory, this was shouted emphatically and succeeded in scaring the "living daylights" out of me, as we would have said in east Texas at the time. No doubt these adults from our memories meant well – at least most of the time – but they also gave young people a message: God was scary. God was eternally angry at me, child that I was, for my sinful nature and my sinful acts, and I should be afraid of this God who held my life in hand. After all, I could be struck down by lightning at any moment or turned into a pillar of salt like Lot's wife in Genesis 19:26.

This kind of fear enforced the image of God in my head at the time. It seemed to me that God was an old, white man who looked remarkably like Uncle Sam on the Army recruitment poster at the post office. His finger was pointing straight at me along with his gaze and, regardless of how I tried to move away from the poster to one side or the other, that finger and gaze followed me. My picture of God was, I must add, considerably meaner looking than Uncle Sam was. For one thing, the face and the finger were much bonier, and he seemed a great deal angrier. So between a well-meaning teacher, a softball coach, and the United States Department of Defense, I was left with the distinct impression that God was definitely one to be afraid of.

But in a biblical context this is not what "fear of God" means. We fear God when we respect God, consider God, and hold God in awe. For example, in the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18: 1-8, Jesus tells of an unjust judge who "neither feared God nor had respect for people." What does this mean? The unjust judge did not have regard for God. God was not considered, respected, or held in reverence by this man. Indeed having "fear" of God as it is most usually encountered in scripture is a way of saying "hold God in awe," not "be terrified of God."

Prevenient Grace Goes Before Us

Far from being a minor point of biblical wording, this fear thing is a big deal. Some well-meaning, faithful Christians teach that God is indeed angry at our sinful nature and our sinful acts beginning at our birth and continuing until such a time as we profess our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Wesleyan Christians, on the other hand, generally have a different understanding. Instead of God being angry at us from our birth, God actually loves us from our conception onward with deep, heart-felt, ardent love. We call this kind of love from God **prevenient grace** since it is the grace that goes before us into our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is love that is present before our conception, before we could possibly invite Jesus into our hearts as Lord and Savior. God is as "crazy in love" with a newborn baby as the parents are because God is, well... like our Holy Parent..

In Isaiah 49 the prophet talks about this kind of love. "The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me... and he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'" And in Romans 5, the apostle Paul states, "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."

The kind of love that calls us before our birth, and that self-sacrifices on our behalf, is God's prevenient grace.

Milk and Cookies Ministry

Even more, God pursues a relationship with us through all sorts of mechanisms. My husband's family did not go to church when he was young. Although they generally considered themselves to be Christian, what that meant was not spelled out for him in any kind of concrete way. In the 1970s, children in elementary school in his hometown had an opportunity to attend religious education once a week as part of their school day. Students who did not participate would do an art project of some kind while

their classmates would climb the hill up from the school to the United Methodist Church in town for their brief time of religious education.

At the UMC with his friends, Blake would listen to stories from the Bible, sing a song, and eat a snack which consisted of homemade chocolate chip cookies and milk. When time was up, he would join his classmates in going back down the hill to his elementary school.

Milk and Cookie Ministry

I must say this did not originally sound very impressive to me; after all, Blake readily admits that he does not remember a single story told or song sung during that time. But he does remember the chocolate chip cookies. And the kind, loving, women who served them. As it turns out, this made quite an impression on him. Many years later during a tumultuous time in his life he decided to seek out a church home. And where did he look? Based upon his memory of kind ladies and homemade cookies, he looked to the United Methodist Church. God used those

ladies from my husband's childhood, and their cookies, to plant a seed within Blake's heart and mind that would eventually grow into a relationship with Jesus Christ. That is just one example of the prevenient grace present in Blake's life, and you and I have that kind of grace in our lives as well.

The truth is that God's grace is greater than our fear. God's grace is greater than our sin, our poor choices, our limitations, our circumstances, our families-of-origin, the social system into which we were born, the sins of others that affect us... pretty much everything. While it is appropriate to be in awe of God, it is not appropriate to be terrified of God. Grace is greater than fear.

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.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How did you imagine God when you were a child? Was God loving and kind? Angry and harsh? Somewhere in between? How do you tend to envision God at this stage of your life?
- Have you ever been afraid of God as opposed to holding God in awe? Share your experience with a partner insofar as you are comfortable doing so.
- 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?



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 3: The Covenant of Christian Baptism

A Baptism Unlike Any Other

The first baptism I presided over as a pastor was an unusual one. I have never had another quite like it. I was serving three churches in a rural setting when I received a phone call from a retired man, whom I will call Bill. "Pastor, you don't know me. I'm related to Jane Doe in one of your churches and my wife and I are hoping you can come out to our house and meet with me. The doctors tell me I'm dying of cancer and I have never been baptized. Would you come out and talk to me about it? I'm not able to come to you."

After checking with my church member who confirmed that Bill was indeed a relative, I made my way at the appointed time to the house of this older couple. The lady greeted me warmly and ushered me into the bedroom where Bill was propped up on pillows. Thus, we began a series of weekly visits during which we talked about life, death, regrets, fear, and faith. We talked about what it meant to be a Christian. We also talked about baptism in depth, about its meaning, the liturgy of the service, and the promises made by the congregation and the one receiving baptism, as we all experience the grace of God together during baptism. We talked about God's love, and about how Bill could embrace baptism even as an older man facing death.

About six weeks later, 10 members of my congregation, including the couple related to this man, accompanied me to the house one Thursday evening. This time the man sat in the living room. We sang a hymn, I read some scripture and prayed, then together we made promises to God and one another using the baptismal liturgy from The United Methodist Hymnal that I had typed out and printed. I baptized Bill that night, and he took the vows of membership in The United Methodist Church even though he had never been in our church building. All of us present, including his wife and son, celebrated Holy Communion together. Bill was only present in the sanctuary of his local church one time, and that was for his funeral just a few weeks later.

Baptism as a Sacrament

Baptism is an outward act that recognizes God's inward action of transforming the identity of the one receiving baptism to that of "Christian." It is one of two sacraments in the United Methodist Church, along with Holy Communion. A **sacrament** is a sacred sign-act pointing to the presence of God in a unique way. In other words, God is present with us through the Holy Spirit in a special way during the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion.

In baptism, we symbolically participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we become part of Christ's universal Church, we are renewed in spirit, and our sin is symbolically washed clean. This last point is primary for Christians in some denominations for which baptism is first and foremost the washing away of sin. It is important to note that for United Methodists, there is more going on here than the washing away of sin. After all, Jesus was baptized, and the Christian tradition teaches that Jesus was without sin.

Baptism is Primarily God's Action

God's prevenient grace is active in the sacrament of baptism because God already loves and accepts the one being baptized. In Bill's case, God's prevenient grace nudged Bill to reach out to me and the congregation I served, seeking information about baptism.

United Methodists believe that baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.¹ The United Methodist Church accepts baptism from other Christian traditions, although not all other Christian traditions accept baptism from the United Methodist Church. We believe there is no need to baptize a person more than once because baptism is primarily God's action. Likewise, United Methodists baptize people of all ages: adults, youth, children, and infants. We do this because baptism is primarily God's action of grace on our behalf. God is the one who initiates baptism; the pastor officiates in that he or she administers the water,

1 For those wanting to remember and renew their baptismal vows, the United Methodist Church offer a service of baptismal affirmation. Many congregations offer this on an annual basis in January. See "The Baptismal Covenant IV: Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant." The United Methodist Hymnal. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. Pp. 50-53.

Wesleyan Roots Session 3: The Covenant of Baptism

but the baptism itself is God's action. Although the majority of Christians in the world baptize infants and young children, I understand that some Christian traditions do not.² I encourage those who were raised in Christian traditions that practice only the baptism of adults to consider the practice of baptism in the ancient church when "entire households" were baptized together. For example, in Acts 16:15,33, we see both the household of Lydia and the household of the Roman jailer being baptized together. And in 1 Corinthians 1:16, Paul reports that he baptized the household of Stephanas. Scholars tell us this was likely to have included all men, women, children, infants, and servants in the household.

Baptism Includes Promises We Make

Baptism is also the point at which God, the one receiving baptism, and the congregation of Christians in a local church enter into a covenant relationship (a holy relationship), one with the other. God has promised all of us a relationship through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has empowered us by the Holy Spirit that we might grow in our faith throughout our lives.

The one receiving baptism in the United Methodist tradition enters into the baptismal covenant by taking some important vows. Bill promised to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, to reject the evil powers of this world, to repent of his sin, and to accept the freedom and power God was giving him to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they presented themselves. He then confessed Jesus Christ as his Savior, promised to put his whole trust in God's grace, and to serve Jesus Christ as Lord in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races.³ But the promises didn't stop there. The congregation then entered into the baptismal covenant by reaffirming their rejection of sin and their commitment to Christ. Together they promised: "With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround Bill with a community of love and forgiveness, that he may grow in his trust of God, and be found faithful in his service to others. We will pray for him, that he may be a true disciple who walks in the way that leads to life." United Methodists do not generally practice private baptism. That is why ten members of the church were present at Bill's house that night, so they could take the covenantal vows of the congregation to support and pray for Bill.

In the case of infants and young children, parents and/or sponsors take vows on behalf of the child in which they promise to do all they can to bring up the child in such a manner that he or she will one day be able to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and take the vows of church membership for himself or herself. When that child reaches the age of consent, he or she is encouraged to participate in an experience of confirmation, during which the young person will confirm the vows made on their behalf at their baptism. It is a sacred responsibility of a congregation and pastor to offer a well-planned and executed confirmation experience for young people so that they, too, may make their own profession of faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ The confirmation process in a local church is one of my favorite times of the year because as the preaching pastor, I have a chance to interact on a weekly basis with young people who are considering a life-changing decision. I have the privilege of maintaining contact over the years with a number of these individuals and am blessed to see the fruit that has been produced from their lives of faith.

Next time you witness a baptism in The United Methodist Church, I encourage you to think about the covenant relationship being established. Think about the promise of God's grace, the promises of the one being baptized (or the parents/sponsors), and the promises of the congregation. These promises, faithfully upheld through the power of the Holy Spirit, are transformative for all of us who claim the name "Christian."

Marsha Engle Middleton

² The Roman Catholic Church baptizes infants and young children, and the majority of Christians in the world are Roman Catholic. The United Methodist tradition concurs with this practice.

³ *The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 34.

⁴ *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, Par. 226.4

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Baptism is an outward act that recognizes God's inward action of transforming the identity of the one receiving baptism to that of "Christian."
 - Baptism is a sacrament in the United Methodist Church during which God, the congregation, and the individual receiving baptism (or their parents or other family) enter a covenant relationship with one another.
 - Baptism is primarily God's action of grace on our behalf, and it is because of this that United Methodists baptize persons of all ages, including infants.
-

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Have you been baptized? If so, were you an infant, a youth, or an adult?
 - In your understanding, what does it mean to be baptized?
 - If you have been baptized, how do you think it has helped to shape your identity as a Christian? If you have not yet been baptized, do you think it would make a difference in how you understand your identity? Why or why not?
 - In what ways do you think entering into a covenant relationship with God and a local church at baptism can help an individual in their Christian journey?
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FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 3: The Covenant of Christian Baptism

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 3 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 as the group explores the baptismal vows of the United Methodist Church.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this baptismal prayer, adapted from *An Australian Prayer Book*:

Almighty God, you delivered your chosen people from slavery in Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea, and established with them a covenant of your unfailing love; mercifully grant that we may be delivered from the slavery of sin through the new covenant, and obtain the promise of eternal life which you have given us in your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Session 3 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

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

- "Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Patty Froehlich. She will talk about baptism in the Wesleyan tradition."
- 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 3:13-17 and 28:16-20

(15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our first scripture is Matthew 3:13-17. Listen for God's word to you." Read the passage below.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw

the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

- In these, or your own words, ask: "The author points out that baptism is more than the washing away of sin. Considering Jesus' baptism, what do you think was the 'righteousness' that Jesus' baptism was to fulfill in the passage above?"
- What other things are going on in baptism today other than the cleansing of sin?
- What does Matthew 3:17 indicate might be going on in baptism?
- Say, "Our second reading is from Matthew 28:16-20." Read the passage below.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- In these or your own words say, "This is a passage known as the Great Commission. The risen Christ tells the disciples to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Why do you think baptism was included in the Great Commission?"

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion

(15 Minutes)

- Have you been baptized? If so, were you an infant, a youth, or an adult?
- In your understanding, what does it mean to be baptized?
- If you have been baptized, how do you think it has helped to shape your identity as a Christian?

Wesleyan Roots Session 3: The Covenant of Baptism

- If you have not yet been baptized, do you think it would make a difference in how you understand your identity? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you think entering into a covenant relationship with God and a local church at baptism can help an individual move along in their Christian journey?
- Then say, "Turn to page 40 in the front of your hymnals. Let us close our time together by reading aloud together the Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith on pages 40-41."

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, "Session 4 is about how United Methodists understand God's gift of free will. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to us getting together next week. Let us review the United Methodist Identity Points in the box at the bottom of your session guide. Session 3 has three identity points. Let's read these out loud together."

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Baptism is an outward act that recognizes God's inward action of transforming the identity of the one receiving baptism to that of "Christian."
- Baptism is a sacrament in the United Methodist Church during which God, the congregation, and the individual receiving baptism (or their parents or other family) enter a covenant relationship with one another.
- Baptism is primarily God's action of grace on our behalf, and it is because of this that United Methodists baptize persons of all ages, including infants.



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



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.



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 1: God's Grace Goes Before Us

Session 4: Free Will vs. Determinism

Do We Mean What We Say About God?

We have all heard God get credit for an awful lot of outcomes during Football season. It seems that God is a HUGE football fan and sometimes even has a favorite team. The other day I heard one player say, "God made nearly every play and made us the victors." I wanted to say, "Wow! It's great that God chose your team and orchestrated all of the moves!" But do we believe that God really does that? This kind of deterministic thinking sees God as one who orchestrates our lives and decides even relatively small things like what we eat for breakfast or the flow of traffic as we drive to work on a given day. Popular phrases like "it was God's plan" and "everything happens for a reason" come from this kind of deterministic thinking. As comforting and celebratory as some of these phrases can be, it is important to understand their implications about who God is and how God acts. United Methodist Christians usually follow with an AMEN when football players talk about God-given gifts and talents, teamwork, admiration, honor, and sacrifice. We understand that being the best we can be is the will of God and a response to "free will."

Does God Cause Harm?

To further make this point, I would like to share a painful experience. There I was, standing by a tiny, closed casket in the viewing area of a local funeral home. It has been my practice to stand close to the casket during what we in the southern part of the United States call "viewing" time whenever there has been a particularly sad or tragic death, and the recent death of a couple's only child by Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) was no exception. As I tried to keep myself as emotionally contained as possible, I found myself dealing with an emotion that was neither sadness nor grief. It was anger! This was because I counted 10 individuals approaching the couple and making remarks like this:

"Your baby was an angel on Earth, and God wanted her to be in heaven with the rest of the angels."

"Someday you will understand why God decided to take your daughter."

"God just wanted another cherub in the heavenly children's choir."

These statements and others like them do not line up with our United Methodist understanding of how God acts in the world. Remember, we know God through the presence of Jesus who comforted and wept with his friends. There are tragic events that happen that are simply beyond our understanding. What we do know is that God is with us, comforts us, and points to resurrected life for us.

Wesleyan Christians like United Methodists do not believe that God "takes" children away from their parents by death or accident. We do not believe that God willingly afflicts a person with cancer, or with a disabling condition, or any other bad thing. We do not believe God causes accidents or disasters, and we do not believe God manipulates human beings through illness, injury, or misfortune into becoming Christian. God came to us, enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth, and suffered a horrendous death on our behalf; therefore, God knows about suffering. In fact, we believe that God cries with us, grieves with us, and suffers with us when we face times of suffering and tragedy, once again as a good parent would do.

God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will

The issue here has to do with the power of God working in the world. This is called **God's sovereignty**, and it is an important concept for all people of faith. We believe God exercises power in creation. For example, with a word God brought forth the stars and planets and all that is. That is a tremendous amount of power, and Wesleyan Christians agree with most other Christians on this point.

Our understanding of human free will is an important distinction that makes United Methodists different. We believe God chooses to exercise sovereignty in such a way as to allow humans to have genuine free will. Some Christian traditions believe that God determines, or has predetermined, the details of our lives and deaths, sort of like pawns being moved around on a cosmic chess board. United Methodists believe that God gave human beings

Wesleyan Roots Session 4: Free Will vs. Determinism

the gift of choosing for ourselves. Along with the concept of grace being foundational to God's very nature, one of the greatest distinctions of United Methodism is our understanding of free will. This is a point of Wesleyan Christianity that has tremendous repercussions throughout our faith and practice.

John Wesley knew deeply that he and his colleagues needed accountability to grow in faith. They knew that when they exercised free will, they could make good or bad choices. They created "bands" or small groups to help them live faithful lives. They looked at the social ills around them and brought education to children on Sundays – the only day they did not have to work in the factories. They brought a message of hope to the miners who were living in rural areas of England, and they fought against enslaving people. United Methodists believe strongly in "social holiness." We believe that we are called to live out our free will by being the hands and feet of Christ in the world. That kind of responsibility was taken up when we said yes to God and made our baptism and confirmation covenants with God and one another.

"Thy Will be Done..."

When we speak of "God's will done on earth as it is in heaven," I absolutely believe that God longs for us to live into God's ways and gracious will! Determinism can sometimes look like God generally wills the minutiae of life. I have heard some say that God has determined what they ate for breakfast and the color of shirt they happened to wear on any given day. If we are going to speak of God's will, we can look at what Christ asks of his followers. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are asked to freely do what is righteous and holy.

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison, and you visited me." (Matt. 25:34-36)

Determinism and Predestination

Finally, some of our brothers and sisters in other Christian traditions believe God has predetermined which humans would receive salvation and which ones would not, and that this happened long before our births. In this scenario, if God has chosen me to be saved, I will be saved. It does not matter whether I believe in God, have a relationship with Jesus Christ, or try to live a Christ-like life. The only

thing that determines my salvation is God's decision, made way before I was ever born. Likewise, if God has chosen for me to not be saved – if God has chosen for me to be damned – I can believe in God, seek a relationship with Jesus Christ, and try to live a Christ-like life. But the only thing that will determine my lack of ultimate salvation is God's decision, again made way before I was ever born. I see no justice in the idea of a deity that makes such arbitrary choices. This element is not present in Wesleyan Christianity.

There are far-reaching implications of what we believe about the dichotomy of free will and determinism, and the Wesleyan understanding of genuine free will as a gift of God is tremendously important.

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.
-

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- 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, our 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?
-



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 5: Scripture in Light of Tradition, Experience and Reason

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 5 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 during the closing time.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this prayer:

Loving God, we confess that we fall short when it comes to reading the Bible as Christians. Sometimes we think we have heard it all before and that there is nothing new there for us. Sometimes we would rather rely on someone else telling us what to think about the Bible rather than encountering your word ourselves. And sometimes, Gracious God, it is confusing to us. Grant us the presence of the Holy Spirit that we might learn to encounter your word to us through scripture in new, fresh, and exciting ways. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Session 5 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

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

- “Today’s presenters on our video are Revs. Scott Luginbill and Sarah Marsalis-Luginbill. They will talk about the distinct way United Methodists approach the Bible.”
- 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: 2 Timothy 3:14–17

(15 Minutes)

- Say, “Our scripture for Session 5 is 2 Timothy 3:14–17. Listen for God’s word to you.”
- Read the passage.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

- In these, or your own words, say: “Our scripture lesson today is a passage referring to the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, because that was the scripture available to the people reading 2 Timothy. The Bible as we have it was not canonized, or made official, until around 200 C.E, which strikes many Christians as being remarkably late. Protestant Christians have 66 books in their Bible while Catholic Christians recognize 77. Each of the books has its own historical and literary context to consider as it is read. The history of how our Bible came to be canonized is an interesting topic for any Christian interested in further study.”
- “The author of 2 Timothy was leaving instructions for those who would read the letter, and these instructions include an important message about scripture.”
- “The passage says that all scripture is inspired by God. The word inspired literally means ‘having breathed.’ So to say scripture is inspired by God means it is ‘God breathed.’”
- Ask: “In your opinion, how do you think biblical texts were written? Did God give them to the writers word-for-word in their original languages, like someone dictating a letter? Or did God give the ideas to the writers who wrote them down in their own words? Or did God use another way? What does the inspiration (or God-breathed nature) of scripture mean to you? How does it influence your faith?”
- The passage also says that all scripture is useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

Wesleyan Roots Session 5: Scripture in Light of Tradition, Experience and Reason

- Ask: "What is something you have learned from the Bible? Has the Bible ever corrected your beliefs or actions in some way? In your opinion, how well does your congregation use the Bible to 'train people in righteousness?'"

The Root of Scripture

- Say, "In some Christian traditions, once a person is confirmed in the church, he or she no longer attends Sunday School or other classes. United Methodists encourage one another to continue in group Bible study, Sunday School, and other faith-related classes such as this one."
- Ask: "Do you think it is important for adults to keep studying the Bible? Why or why not? What are some ways you could make time for more Bible study in your life?"
- Ask: "Do you think a tool like the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (viewing scripture through the lenses of tradition, experience, and reason) might help you approach the study of scripture differently? Why or why not?"

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- Have you or someone you know ever followed the teaching of *sola scriptura* (scripture only)? How might such an understanding influence the way a person lives out her or his faith?
- In your opinion, what difference does it make to say we believe in *prima scriptura* (scripture as our primary source) rather than in *sola scriptura* (scripture as our only source)?

- Name a passage of scripture that you find confusing and apply the four criteria of the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" to it. Think through the passage, along with the questions it raises, using scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. What was this like for you? Do you think this is a helpful way to approach biblical texts? Why or why not?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, "Thank you for participating in Session 5 of Wesleyan Roots. Session 6 is about how United Methodists understand God's gift of salvation. 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 5 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has three identity points. Let's read these out loud together."
- "Please turn in The United Methodist Hymnal to #595 and let us join together in reading the words of "Whether the Word be Preached or Read" by Charles Wesley.

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- United Methodists believe the Bible is the central and primary source of God's revelation to us and that it contains all things necessary for salvation.
- We read the Bible through "lenses" of Christian tradition, personal and corporate experience, and human reason.
- United Methodists encourage Christians to engage with the biblical text, ask questions, and give serious thought to matters of faith and practice. Questions are encouraged in the United Methodist Church. We do not "check our brains at the door" when we enter a church sanctuary or classroom.



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 5: Scripture In Light of Tradition, Experience and Reason

How Does God Communicate with Us?

We often think of our communication with God as both vertical and horizontal in nature. Our time of prayer and listening for God holds a more vertical aspect, while our time with human beings and creation illuminates God in a more horizontal way. One thing is certain: human beings yearn to be in a relationship with God and we believe God also seeks to be in relationship with us. This horizontal and vertical relationship is seen throughout the scriptures in the Old and the New Testaments.

United Methodists believe that the primary way we know God is through the scriptures. We understand that the Bible is a key means of our experience of God, and that it contains all things necessary for salvation. United Methodists generally do not understand the Bible to be authoritative in areas such as science. The Roman Catholic Church, which had for generations emphasized the Bible as a source for religious professionals, changed their approach during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) emphasizing the study of scripture for laity.¹ Since that time, some of the best biblical scholarship has been done by Roman Catholic scholars.

Protestants were, from their beginning, oriented around scripture being the main source of divine revelation. In fact, one of the factors being “protested” by Protestants was extreme human authority. Instead of relying on a human being’s word, Martin Luther translated the Bible to German while under house arrest. Soon the printing press was invented and before long, laypeople had an opportunity to read the Bible for themselves, in their own language.

Some denominations adopt the doctrine of *sola scriptura* (“by scripture alone”) as their official source for theological discourse. Some, in fact, honor the Bible so much it seems

like they are worshiping the Bible itself. United Methodists understand that scripture is the “living word” which illuminates and points to the God we worship. We do not worship the Bible. We worship the triune God.

Four Criteria for Wesleyan Faith and Practice

We understand it is impossible for a person to read the Bible without using certain “lenses” through which we look at the text. Albert Outler (1908 – 1989) was the Wesleyan scholar who first put words to these “lenses” of faith for Wesleyan Christians. He called the Bible, along with three lenses, **the Wesleyan Quadrilateral**.² As such, United Methodists understand that we read and understand scripture through the “lenses” of tradition, experience, and reason.³

For United Methodists, scripture remains the primary source (*prima scriptura*) from which we learn about God’s revelation. When I teach about the understanding of *prima scriptura* to confirmation students and adults in my congregations, I also talk about the manner through which we derive our biblical understandings. I say that the Bible is our primary source of revelation insofar as it is read as a whole, in context, by a thinking adult. To unpack this a bit, in the United Methodist tradition we discourage “proof-texting.” In other words, we try not to have an idea in our mind and pull a verse or two out of the Bible that supports our idea. We generally strive to read the Bible more holistically, with the understanding that God has an overarching message, and that all scripture is to be interpreted within that understanding. One way to state this is that we tend to read the parts of the Bible by the whole. We confidently claim that the scriptures have something to say to us today. We recognize the cultural differences of the time and consider these factors as we read the scriptures. We also consider things like historical context. For example, when Jesus tells the parable of the

¹ See The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Second Vatican Council, 1965

² Recent scholarship has been leaning away from the term Wesleyan Quadrilateral and toward calling the four criteria of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason by other names; however, there does not seem to be a consensus about alternate monikers.

³ *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016. Pp. 83 – 88

Wesleyan Roots Session 5: Scripture in Light of Tradition, Experience and Reason

Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-31, we understand that he was speaking to the “super-religious” Jewish folks of his day who scorned Samaritans with a passion. The fact that Jesus made the Samaritan the hero of the story is particularly powerful once one considers that historical context. We also look at our faith and read scripture through the “lens” of Christian tradition. **Christian tradition** includes everything that has been passed down to us from our Jewish heritage and the Church since its earliest times. It includes things like the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, writings of Christians from over the centuries, official teachings of the Church in all its forms from the past, the theological content of our hymns, and even centuries of visual art such as paintings and sculpture. Growing up in the western part of the world, and greatly influenced by northern European history as most folks who were educated in the United States have been, I understand there is great overlap between historical events and the teachings of the Church at any given point in time. For example, John Wesley’s decisions about the Methodist movement in the United States were made in consideration of the Revolutionary War. John Wesley was a priest in the Church of England. He did not set out to form a “new” church but to revive the one of which he already was a part. When it came to America, however, he decided that a new church would have to be established if the Methodist movement was to survive.

At this point I want to emphasize that we learn much from Christian tradition handed down by those who have been on the margins of society. The Christian understandings gleaned from enslaved Black people and from Native Americans, for example, teach us much about faithfulness during oppression. We receive rich tradition from the Civil Rights movement in the United States, from Cambodia, Japan, the Congo, Christians in South Korea, and from people of faith all over the globe. We also receive richly from women throughout the history of Christianity, and others whose opinions were often set aside while male voices of Anglo-Saxon descent were emphasized. The truth is that all voices of the Church from its inception together form Christian tradition for United Methodists, and we are the better for it.

The third source of faith and our next “lens” is that of experience, both personal and corporate. In this context, **experience** refers to that of the greater Christian community, as well as to an individual Christian’s personal experience. For example, I read the Bible as an ordained, middle-class, woman living in North America. I cannot avoid that reality because it is who I am and where I come from. No matter how hard I might try, I cannot read the

Bible from the perspective of an 18th century African male, or from the point of view of a 21st century Latina woman living in Central America. I am not an immigrant to the United States, so although I honor the stories of immigrants, I cannot claim that story as my own. I do strive, however, to be open to opportunities to hear from people of different races, cultures, and backgrounds about how they read and interpret the Bible. My experience is mine alone, and it cannot help but influence my understanding of the Bible as I read. Furthermore, we have corporate experience to consider as well – the experience of the saints and all those who have witnessed to their faith in God. Both personal and corporate experience are powerful lenses that help us see what God has for us as we read the Bible and experience the living God.

The next source is the lens of **reason**. Although persons in some Christian traditions may try to read scripture without using reason, United Methodists believe this is not possible. We understand ourselves as created by God to be mindful and intelligent beings. Furthermore, the Wesleyan tradition honors questions about scripture and the Christian faith. We do not discourage questions, but rather we hold that “holy conversations” lead to a clearer, deeper understanding of God and the scriptures. These engagements of the mind and intellect are meant to ground us in our faith in God. The use of biblical commentaries, scholarly writings, and lively debates are all ways we address our deepest questions and grow in our relationship with God. I believe employing our reason, the source of many questions, is one of the ways we were created in God’s very image (see Gen. 1:27).

Putting the Criteria to Work in Real Life

The use of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral tends to be virtually automatic for Wesleyan Christians in that many of us do not frequently need to consciously process the criteria. However, using the four criteria intentionally can be a powerful way to add to our biblical understanding and our faith. As I encounter situations in life that leave me puzzled, I will intentionally ask myself:

1. What does the Bible say about this situation?
2. What can I learn about this from the tradition of Christians who went before me?
3. What does my experience, and the experience of the faithful people of God tell me about this moment?
4. What seems reasonable to me as one made in the image of God, as well as what seems reasonable to those who have deeply thought about and studied this issue or situation?

Wesleyan Roots Session 5: Scripture in Light of Tradition, Experience and Reason

An example of how this works might be found in the way the United Methodist Church understands divorce. In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, Jesus teaches against divorce. At first glance this may seem restrictive to readers in our day and time; however, a careful reading of these texts through the lenses of tradition, experience, and reason demonstrates this passage to illustrate one of the ways Jesus helped his followers to show compassion to the marginalized. According to ancient Jewish law and practice, a wife could simply be “dismissed” at the pleasure of her husband for any reason, or for no reason at all. This was the “certificate of divorce” of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 19:7. A woman in this situation had very limited options. If her father would not receive her back into his home, she would be left to fend for herself which could

lead her to starve to death, or force her to enter into alternative means of earning income which would clearly break Jewish law. Removing a husband’s freedom to simply “dismiss” his wife was actually a means of protecting women of the time while increasing accountability for husbands.

Next time you find yourself perplexed by a question or situation, or have a decision to make, give the four sources of Wesleyan theological thought a try for yourself. I suspect you will discover it to be one of the great gifts of the Wesleyan tradition.

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- United Methodists believe the Bible is the central and primary source of God’s revelation to us and that it contains all things necessary for salvation.
- We read the Bible through “lenses” of Christian tradition, personal and corporate experience, and human reason.
- United Methodists encourage Christians to engage with the biblical text, ask questions, and give serious thought to matters of faith and practice. Questions are encouraged in the United Methodist Church. We do not “check our brains at the door” when we enter a church sanctuary or classroom.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Have you or someone you know ever followed the teaching of *sola scriptura*? How might such an understanding influence the way a person lives out her or his faith?
- In your opinion, what difference does it make to say we believe in *prima scriptura* (scripture as our primary source) rather than in *sola scriptura* (scripture as the only source)?
- Name a passage of scripture that you find confusing and apply the four criteria of the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” to it. Think through the passage, along with the questions it raises, using scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. What was this like for you? Do you think this is a helpful way to approach biblical texts? Why or why not?



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 6: Salvation as More of a Journey-in-Process Than an Event

What Do We Mean By “Salvation?”

Christians seem to talk about salvation a lot, so what precisely does this mean? Most Christian traditions believe salvation is a gift of grace by faith through the love of God as made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are all active in God's salvation. To some Christians, the product of salvation is when we go to heaven after we die. Wesleyan Christians agree with this, but there is another dimension to salvation in addition to an understanding of an afterlife. Indeed, United Methodists understand that salvation begins now. **Salvation** is a state of relationship in which we live in harmony with God through the actions of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. As such, it is generally considered to be a process that lasts throughout our lives, and even after.

During my years in ministry, I have met individuals who have had an experience of salvation that appeared to be instantaneous. One man, the brother of a church member, had lived a difficult life burdened with addiction, homelessness, and the health concerns that can accompany those conditions. When this man entered into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, it seemed to happen very quickly – almost instantaneously. The change was immediate. He did not physically look like the same man. In his case, God gifted him with sobriety and improved health which lasted the remainder of his life and equipped him to have a home with family from whom he had previously been estranged. It was an amazing sight, and I thank God for the reality that this kind of sudden transformation can happen.

That said, this does not seem to be the story of most Christians with whom I come into contact, either through the United Methodist Church or other denominations. Most of us tend to describe our experience with God throughout our lives as a journey or a process. I like to

think of salvation in the Wesleyan context as a journey-in-process, and it may be helpful to talk about some of the points along the journey.

Prevenient Grace

Imagine a timeline moving from left to right across a large piece of paper. On the far left, almost at the edge but not quite, there is a star which represents your birth as a baby. Nine months or so before would be your conception, and this would be further toward the far left of the paper. Even before that is **prevenient grace**, God's grace that goes before us into our lives (see Session 2). Prevenient grace provides for us the capacity to realize that we need a relationship with God. It nudges us in such a manner that we might decide to say “yes” to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. To represent this on the timeline, I usually scribble a cloud going off the left-hand side of the paper representing prevenient grace, and the cloud moves above the timeline to the right, representing God's grace that goes before us. God pursues a relationship with each one of us through prevenient grace, and there are no exceptions to this. God loves every human being right from the start.

This is one place where our Wesleyan perspective differs from that of some other Christian traditions. A number of Christians in other denominations understand God as less loving and more angry. The reason for this is because of the sinful state often referred to as **original sin** or birth sin.¹ Wesleyans think of original sin somewhat differently. It is not that the image of God in which we were created was eradicated by sin, but rather that God's image within us has been marred or distorted by sin. This is a significant distinction, and we believe that God's very nature, being one of grace, envelops a newborn with love just like loving parents do. The bottom line here is that Wesleyans do not tend to understand God as being angry with human beings

¹ Helpful and differing Wesleyan discussions of original sin can be found in the work of Bishop Scott J. Jones and Randy L. Maddox. See Jones, Scott J. *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. And Maddox Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994.

Wesleyan Roots Session 6: Salvation as More of a Journey-In-Process Than an Event

from birth, but instead God loves them and desires the best for them.

Justification

Let us imagine the timeline once again. As we move to the right, the line would be intersected by a vertical line with arrows going up and down at both ends. This is the point of justification. **Justification** is when a Christian accepts the offer of the gift of a relationship with Jesus Christ, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ become real for them. The work of justification took place on the cross just over 2000 years ago and is affirmed as we repent of our sin and seek to lead a new, God-centered life. **Justifying grace** is the grace that acts to reconcile us with God through the work of Jesus Christ, and it is an amazing gift of God. Just as a person hits "Control J" in a word processing application to justify margins on a page, God "sets us straight" and we begin to participate in a relationship with God. The Bible calls this "new birth," being "born again," or being "born from above" (John 3:3).

The justification that we receive as a gift of God through Jesus Christ may have been instantaneous, but we may or may not remember it. In some other Protestant traditions, Christians believe that authentic salvation occurs when they can name the date and time when they were "saved." Some can do this, like the man I wrote about earlier, but perhaps most of us cannot. I cannot remember when I received justification as a gift of God. There came a point in my life when I just found myself there. Since I was raised in the context of a church, it was more like walking up a ramp than taking a big leap. I was there almost before I knew it. I did experience the rite of confirmation (see session 3) and it was extremely important to me, but I suspect I experienced justification prior to that day.

Sanctification

A number of Protestant denominations would consider a person's salvation to be complete at this point. Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they are saved and that is that. Back to the timeline, however, moving to the right past the intersecting vertical line representing our relationship with Jesus Christ, you may notice that there is a good bit of your timeline left. In the case of Wesleyan Christians, the process of our journey of salvation is still very much underway. Once we are justified, we immediately begin the process of **sanctification**. This is the point after our justification when we actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit to grow in our faith and to become more Christlike, and it is yet another gift of God in the Wesleyan way of salvation. In the United Methodist Church and in other Wesleyan denominations,

sanctification is a big Wesleyan root. We believe God accepts us just as we are in justification, then goes about the business of transforming us mightily during sanctification. God's grace through the Holy Spirit acting upon us at this point is called sanctifying grace. If a person chooses to cooperate with this grace, he or she will become more and more like Christ in the way they live and in the way they love others.

Our Wesleyan roots also include three other points to name here. First, at some point in our journey Christians receive **assurance of salvation**. This was of great importance to John Wesley. I describe it for myself as a sense of "peace with God." I did not always have this; in fact, I sought assurance of my salvation on an inward level for a long time. It was not until I became familiar with my Wesleyan roots that I received this gift.

Secondly, Wesley did not agree with the teaching from some Christian groups of the "Perseverance of the Saints." Another way of saying this is that Wesley did not agree with the concept "once saved, always saved." Most United Methodists agree, thinking that the understanding of "once saved, always saved" does not stand the test of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (see Session 5). The heart of this difference with some Christian groups is our understanding of free will mentioned earlier in this study in Session 4. **Free will** is a gift of God to humanity and is one way in which we are created in God's own image. Wesley believed that at some point a person could change her or his mind and "backslide" out of relationship with Jesus Christ. It is critical to note here that Jesus Christ never leaves us, not ever. In the event a person does "backslide" to the point that they no longer consider themselves a Christian, prevenient grace again is present to pursue that person and to convince them to reenter that relationship with God they had previously. God never loses any human being, although it is possible for a person to "self-select" out of relationship with God by one's own choice and action. Another important aspect to consider at this point is that periodic human doubt about God and our relationship with God does not mean one is "backsliding." In fact, wrestling with our doubt can lead to great spiritual growth as intentional Christians.

Finally, Wesley taught that it was possible and plausible to experience full sanctification while still alive. He called this being "made perfect in love," and Wesleyans refer to this as **Christian perfection**. It is helpful to understand what Christian perfection is not. It does not mean that a person will never make a mistake, it does not mean that a person will reach Christian perfection in this life and stay that way

Wesleyan Roots Session 6: Salvation as More of a Journey-In-Process Than an Event

until death, and it does not mean that a person becomes sinless, infallible, or without error. What it did mean to Wesley is that a person could reach a point in their Christian journey where they do not break a known commandment and, more importantly, where they love others as Christ loves. I think of Christian perfection like this: in my mind I am thinking about a person that caused me serious harm. When I see this person, my stomach clenches, my heart starts to beat faster, and I struggle with whether I will speak to them or what I will say to them if I do decide to speak. In a state of Christian perfection,

however, I would look at that person and experience no anxiety, no anger, and no fear. I would only experience genuine love for him or her! That would be amazing for me, and for those with whom I come into contact. I pray that I might be made “perfect in love” in this life so I can experience the opportunity to truly love as God loves.

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Salvation is a gift of grace by faith through the love of the Triune God, made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Most United Methodists describe their experience of salvation as more of a process than an event.
- Salvation includes the whole work of God in our lives. For United Methodists, salvation is not only justification and sanctification, but God’s saving work throughout our entire lives.
- God acts in salvation in a number of ways. Through prevenient grace, God pursues a relationship with us. Through justifying grace, we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Through sanctifying grace, we become more Christ-like through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- If you are a Christian, how do you think of your salvation? Is it more of an event, or is it more like a journey? Why?
- How has God pursued you to be in relationship with God? It might have been through a relative, or through a favorite teacher. It might have been at camp as a young person, in a small group during your college years, or in many other ways.
- As part of the process of salvation, do you believe God can utilize non-Christians or people of other religious traditions to influence us? Why or why not?
- In what ways is God calling you to become more like Christ through sanctification?



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 6: Salvation as More of a Journey-in-Process Than an Event

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 6 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 during the closing liturgy.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this prayer, adapted from a prayer published by the PrayerInstitute.com.

*Loving God, we thank you for your unconditional love. Thank you for showing us just how great your love is by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Lord God, we thank you for the precious gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens! We put our hope in you, Lord. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.*¹

Session 6 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

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

- “Today’s presenter on our video is Rev. Mitchell Boone. He will talk about salvation.
- 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: Ephesians 2:8–9, James 2:14–18

(15 Minutes)

- Say, “Our first scripture for Session 6 is Ephesians 2:8–9. Listen for God’s word to you.”
- Read the passage.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

- In these, or your own words, say: “This passage from Ephesians has great significance for Christians in that it reminds us that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the one who offers us the gift of salvation. It is not something we can ever earn on our own. In fact, even the sense that we need God in the first place is a gift of prevenient grace. Sometimes it is difficult for Christians to remember that what we do is out of thankfulness to God and not to save ourselves.
- Ask: “What are some things that people might try to do to save themselves?” (attend church, give money, do good deeds, etc.)
- Say: “Now let’s look at our second scripture, James 2:14–18. Hear God’s word to us today.”

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

- Say “It appears that the scripture from Ephesians is saying we are saved by faith and not by good works, yet in James we are told that ‘Faith without works is dead.’”
- Ask “How might you resolve this apparent contradiction in scripture?” (follow the newest of the two passages, follow the oldest of the two passages, look for a compromise, etc.)

¹ www.prayerinstitute.com/prayer/march-3-a-prayer-of-thanksgiving-for-salvation/

Wesleyan Roots Session 6: Salvation as More of a Journey-in-Process Than an Event

- Say “Faith and works are essential to salvation, but in different ways. Wesleyan scholar and Bishop Scott Jones writes, ‘Strictly speaking, it is only faith that is necessary for salvation. It is immediately necessary. But good works are necessary for a lively faith, and so they are remotely necessary.’² In short, a Christian is one who has faith and is one who cooperates with the Holy Spirit in such a way that he or she can do good things for God, for the world, for others, and for the church.
- Ask: “Do you think God expects Christians to act faithfully after their justification? Why or why not?”

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- If you are a Christian, how do you think of your salvation? Is it more of an event, or is it more like a journey? Why?
- How has God pursued you to be in relationship with God? It might have been through a relative, or through a favorite teacher or at camp as a young person, in a small group during your college years, or in many other ways.
- As part of the process of salvation, do you believe God can utilize non-Christians or people from other religious traditions to influence us? Why or why not?
- In what ways is God calling you to become more like Christ through sanctification?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, “Session 7 is about how God created us, as diverse as we are, in God’s own image, and about how this impacts how we are called to live lives of faith. 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 6 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has three identity points. Let’s read these out loud together.”
- Say, “Let us close by affirming our faith with the words of Romans 8:35,37-39, #887 in the back of your hymnal. I will read the part of the leader, and we will all read the part of the people.
- Leader: What 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, or 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:

- Salvation is a gift of grace by faith through the love of the Triune God, made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Most United Methodists describe their experience of salvation as more of a process than an event.
- Salvation includes the whole work of God in our lives. For United Methodists, salvation is not only justification and sanctification, but God’s saving work throughout our entire lives.
- God acts in salvation in a number of ways. Through prevenient grace, God pursues a relationship with us. Through justifying grace, we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Through sanctifying grace, we become more Christ-like through the power of the Holy Spirit.

² Jones, Scott J. *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. P. 188



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 7: Diverse by Design

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer (5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 7 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 published by Prayerist.com¹

Almighty God, through your Holy Spirit you created unity in the midst of diversity;

We acknowledge that human diversity is an expression of your manifold love for your creation; We confess that in our brokenness as human beings we turn diversity into a source of alienation, injustice, oppression, and wounding. Empower us to recognize and celebrate differences as your great gift to the human family. Enable us to be the architects of understanding, of respect and love;

Through the Lord, the ground of all unity, we pray. Amen

Session 7 Introduction and Video (15 minutes)

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

- "Today's presenters on our video are Revs. Danielle Kim and Abbey Echols. They will talk about how the church is diverse by intent, not default.
- 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: Genesis 1:26-28, Galatians 3:27-29 (15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our first scripture for Session 7 is Genesis 1:26-28. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage below.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the

cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

- In these, or your own words, say: "In the poetic version of the creation account, we read about God creating humanity in God's own image. From this passage, we can perceive that humans were intentionally created, that we were made in the image and likeness of God, and that we are to have dominion over other living creatures."
- Ask: "What do you think it means to be made in the image of God? How might this impact the way you treat yourself? How might it change the way you treat others?"
- Do you think this passage of scripture helps us understand why racism is sinful? Why or why not?
- Do you think having dominion over living things and "subduing" the earth gives us any ecological responsibilities? Why or why not?
- Say: "Now let's look at our second scripture, Galatians 3:27-29. Hear God's word to us today."

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

- Say "Paul is writing to Christians who are arguing that it is necessary for male Gentiles to be circumcised to become Christian. He is arguing that with the coming of Christ the necessity of things like circumcision went away. Circumcision had been a mark of identity for Jewish men and a significant part of the Jewish culture

¹ <https://prayerist.com/prayer/diversity/>

Wesleyan Roots Session 7: More Than a Memory—Meeting God at the Table

for many generations. Note that with the coming of Christ, baptism is the identifying mark of the Christian.”

- Ask: “In Paul’s time, how would a statement about a person’s national origin or ethnic identity, a person’s status as a freed or indentured individual, and a person’s gender be heard by the church at Galatia? What changes might they need to make to live into Paul’s words? How difficult do you think this would have been for them?”
- Ask: “How do you think the church might be different if we listened to the spirit of Paul’s words? What might we be required to change? How difficult would it be?”

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- What are some ways that you see United Methodists working towards diversity? Do you think this is important? Why or why not?
- What are some ways in which we are not doing well enough in our inclusion and acceptance of others?
- Given our belief that all people are created in the image of God, how does that make you consider the sin of racism? How is acting to minimize racism connected to your Christian faith?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, “Session 8 is about how we meet Jesus Christ in the Lord’s Supper, and how Wesleyan Christians understand that we encounter Christ’s real presence during that time. 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 7 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has three identity points. Let’s read these out loud together.”
- Say, “Please turn in your hymnals to number 148 and let us read together the words of this beautiful Native American hymn about creation for our closing.”

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- All people are of sacred worth, including people of all ages, genders, national origins, native languages, educational status, socioeconomic conditions, sexual orientations, abilities and disabilities, and political ideologies.
- United Methodists strive to be diverse by intent, not by default. We are called to look for ways to be more inclusive of others and to live this intentional diversity out in our everyday lives, as well as in our lives related to the church.
- United Methodists are diverse in almost every way imaginable, including in how we understand non-essentials of Christianity.



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 7: Diverse By Design

The Reality of Diversity

United Methodists live in many places around the world, from rural areas and large cities, to suburbs and villages. Regardless of where we live, I suspect most of us live in communities that are more diverse now than they were a decade ago. Even the most rural areas in Texas, the state with which I am most familiar, are rapidly becoming more diverse. In the mid-size Texas town where I live, it is rare to go to a store or a restaurant and not hear three or four different languages spoken.

Some of us come from other nations as first- or second-generation immigrants. Some of us were born and raised right where we are now. Some grew up not being the majority ethnic group in our culture. And even if our community is made up of folks who look and speak just like us, we don't need to look far to glimpse the reality that the almost eight billion human beings living in the world right now are diverse. I am arguing that we are diverse by design.

Diversity as a Wesleyan Root

When it comes to living with one another in the midst of our differences, United Methodists are clear that we are to treat one another as sisters and brothers. We put great value on diversity in our denomination, in our congregations, and in our world. Article IV of our Constitution delivers a clear statement on the inclusiveness of the church, which goes hand-in-hand with diversity. At our best, United Methodists strive to be diverse by intent, not by default.¹ We are called to look for ways to be more inclusive and diverse throughout our local congregations, annual conferences, and ecumenical endeavors.

The Wesleyan root of diversity stems directly from our roots in the Bible. We know from Genesis 1:26–27 that all people are created in the image of God. We are distinct from the rest of God's created order. Because we carry a spark of God's image within us, when we look at another human being, we are looking at a part of God's own image.

We might say that God is present in every face of every human being we encounter. In Acts 2:5–12, the account of Pentecost—the birthday of the Church—makes it clear that God was doing something new when it came to those who were included in the Church.

"Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'"

This amazing event confirmed what Jesus had indicated in his ministry all along: both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) were to be a part of the Reign of God.² Scripture describes God stating this clearly several places in Genesis, including Genesis 22:18, "... by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves..." But people back then were not all that different from people today. It takes a while for us to catch on to God's expectations of us, especially when those expectations are countercultural.

All people are of sacred worth to God. God created, and therefore loves, all people, including people of all ages, genders, races, national origins, native languages, educational status, socioeconomic conditions, sexual orientations, abilities or disabilities, and political ideologies. Jesus made it a point to engage with people on the margins of society in his day: Samaritans, Gentiles, Roman soldiers, women, children, those experiencing illness

¹ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2016. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016. Paragraph 4, Article 4, p. 26.

² See Matthew 2:1–12, Matthew 8:11, Matthew 28: 19, Mark 5: 1 – 20, Mark 7:31–3, Luke 7:1–10, Luke 10:22–37, John 4:1–42, etc.

Wesleyan Roots Session 7: Diverse by Design

including leprosy, and individuals struggling with blindness, deafness, and mobility differences. Jesus could not have been clearer about the fact that in the reign of God, including the kingdom present now, things are different than in this world. Indeed, those who come in last in the social order are just the ones to come in first in the order that matters most – the eternal order of the Kingdom of God.

More than Tolerance

Insofar as the Church can live out God's reign on Earth, we are called to be diverse and inclusive by intent. But this does not mean that we simply tolerate one another. Instead, we are to encourage participation and leadership by every person according to their spiritual gifts as part of the Body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-31). This means that women and men, people of color and white people, people who speak languages other than English and English-speaking people and so on, are all key parts of Christ's body. We need one another. If everyone looked the same, spoke the same, came from the same background, and thought the same, the Church would be an exclusive club and not the Body of Christ at all.

And here is perhaps the most difficult part: each one of us has our own spiritual growing to do when it comes to including others. Perhaps one person is enthusiastic about people of all races being part of the United Methodist Church, but when it comes to people who are not neurotypical... well, not so much. Perhaps another person believes that more mature men and women should be included in decision-making within a congregation, but when it comes to including younger folks in church government, that is somehow different. Each of us individually, and all of us collectively, are called to be sure we are not guilty of "false advertisement" – of saying we welcome everyone, yet living as if we do not.

Theological Diversity

United Methodists are also theologically diverse, and I consider this to be a great gift. John Wesley is remembered for his openness to Christians from other theological positions. Among his words on the issue are the following: "There are many doctrines of a less essential nature... In these we may think and let think; we may 'agree to disagree.' But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials..."³

I consider it a great blessing to be a part of a denomination that encourages me to think, ask questions, and seek

answers, as this is not the case in all denominations. In fact, some other Christian traditions view divergence among theological ideation to be a bad thing. For us it is a strength and a way in which we provide a check and balance against ourselves as we work together to help bring about the fullness of God's Reign.

Unity, not Uniformity

We are called to be diverse and to be united in our diversity, but we are not called to be uniform. This is important. Every culture has its own characteristics. While I long for true diversity in all parts of life, and especially in the Church, this is not the same thing as wanting everyone to worship the same way, to sing exactly the same hymns and worship songs, to read the Bible in the same language, and to listen to the same style of preaching. We are different, yet we are the same. Most importantly, we are in this journey of life and faith together.

When you find yourself being challenged or stretched by another who differs from you in any number of ways, remember Jesus Christ, our God Incarnate, who spent his ministry demonstrating how to love the person in front of him regardless of who they were or where they were from.

From my perspective as a white woman who carries certain inherent privilege, I am called to be vigilant in how I embrace diversity in all aspects of my life. I am called to learn all I can about the sin of exclusion, to own my part in that sin, to repent of my sin, and to endeavor to live a new life following the commandments of Christ (Matthew 22: 36-40). I have a long way to go, but the Holy Spirit is empowering me to grow toward perfection in love, and as I become sanctified, I am able to recognize the hatred and exclusion around me and that in which I participate. Let us be diverse by intention and not by default, and let us keep vigilant watch on behalf of our brothers and sisters. May it be so.

Marsha Engle Middleton

³ Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church. Sermons. On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, page 2. Archived October 11, 2008, at the Wayback Machine <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/10-fascinating-facts-about-john-wesley-and-united-methodism>

United Methodist Identity Points:

- All people are of sacred worth, including people of all ages, genders, national origins, native languages, educational status, socioeconomic conditions, sexual orientations, abilities, and political ideologies.
 - United Methodists strive to be diverse by intent, not by default. We are called to look for ways to be more inclusive of others and to live this intentional diversity out in our everyday lives, as well as in our lives related to the church.
 - United Methodists are diverse in almost every way imaginable, including in how we understand non-essentials of Christianity.
-

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What are some ways that you see United Methodists working towards diversity? Do you think this is important? Why or why not?
 - What are some ways in which we are not doing well enough in our inclusion and acceptance of others?
 - Given our belief that all people are created in the image of God, how does that make you consider the sin of racism? How is acting to minimize racism connected to your Christian faith?
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FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 8: More Than a Memory—Meeting God at the Table

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer (5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 8 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.

Loving God, we give you thanks for your abiding presence with us, and for the means of grace through which we experience your love and mercy in powerful ways. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us during this session of Wesleyan Roots, that we might better understand your gift of Holy Communion to us. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in your Holy Church. Amen.

Session 8 Introduction and Video (15 minutes)

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

- "Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Cammy Gaston. She will talk about how the church is diverse by intent, not default.
- 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 26:26-29 (15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our scripture for Session 8 is Matthew 26:26-29. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage below.

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;

for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

- In these, or your own words, say: "These words are familiar to us. They are part of the prayer offered by the pastor, blessing the bread and the juice for Holy Communion. They are called the "words of institution," and they are a necessary part of Holy Communion in the United Methodist Church."
- Ask: "Do you think it is important that the pastor repeats the words of Jesus whenever Holy Communion is celebrated? Why or why not?"
- Say, "In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' last supper was the Passover meal called the seder. During the seder meal, Jews remember the gift of freedom as God delivered them from captivity in Egypt. In Exodus 12, God commanded the Hebrew people in Egypt to prepare a lamb to eat using a specific method of cooking and, on a given night, mark the two doorposts and lintel of their homes with blood from that lamb. When the final plague came, the "angel of death" would pass over the homes marked with the blood of the lamb, thus the people would be saved. Being the seder meal, Jesus' words at the last supper identified himself with that lamb that was sacrificed for the salvation of God's people."
- Ask, "What do you think it would have been like for the disciples when Jesus stated the words of institution ("This is my body ... this is my blood) in light of their understanding of the seder meal?"
- What does Jesus give or offer at the Last Supper?
- How is Holy Communion a means of experiencing God's grace?

Wesleyan Roots Session 8: More Than a Memory—Meeting God at the Table

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- How do you understand Holy Communion? Do you experience the presence of God in the sacrament, or is it more of a memorial service to you?
- What difference might it make in your experience of Holy Communion if you approached the table expecting God to be present?
- How important is the “open table” to you? How would you describe this Wesleyan understanding to a non-Wesleyan friend or family member?

- "Let us review the United Methodist Identity Points from Session 8 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has three identity points. Let's read these out loud together."
- Say, "Please turn in your hymnals to #616 and let us read together the words of the hymn "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast." These words were written by Charles Wesley in 1747.

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, "Session 9 is about John Wesley's notion of social holiness and how it influences our lives as Christians. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to us getting together next week."

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Holy Communion is a sacrament offering us an opportunity to experience the real spiritual presence of Christ in a unique way.
- All people have access to Holy Communion within the Methodist tradition. You do not need to be United Methodist, nor a member of another church, to respond to the invitation.
- Holy Communion is a means of grace to us, serving as a conduit of God's love and mercy which we then can extend to others.



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 2: Understanding the Nature and Action of God

Session 8: More Than a Memory—Meeting God at the Table

“What is Wrong with My Dad?”

I was raised in a Christian household with a United Methodist father and a faithful mother who was an active member of a congregation from another denomination. I worshiped with both my parents, alternating between Mom and Dad every other Sunday. This was a great experience for me, with one significant exception. It was not uncommon for the three of us to worship together. All was well when my Mom attended the UMC, but when my Dad attended my mom’s church something was different. My mother’s denomination had rules about who was allowed to participate in Holy Communion. I knew that not every denomination permitted children to participate, so the fact that I was not welcome at Holy Communion was not a big problem for me. But when my dad was not welcome, that was a different story altogether. It made no sense to me why my mom’s church would not accept a faithful Christian adult such as my father at their communion table. Soon I was at the age of confirmation and I was called to choose between my mom’s church and the United Methodist Church. The choice was easy. I wanted to be a part of a church that practiced open communion.

The Belief and Practice of Holy Communion

The United Methodist Church is distinct from many Christian traditions in how we practice and understand Holy Communion. Some denominations, like The United Methodist Church, consider Holy Communion to be a sacrament. Some denominations do not. Depending on the customs of a congregation or denomination, grape juice or wine is used, as well as bread from that local culture. Some churches use unleavened bread, to reflect the seder (Passover) meal. Some groups use a common cup for the wine or juice. Some denominations pray very specific prayers at Holy Communion, while others are less formal. In some congregations, people come forward and are either served standing or kneeling at a communion rail. In other traditions, people are served in their seats.

There are also many different beliefs about Holy Communion among Christian groups. For some denominational traditions, Holy Communion is considered to be an act of memorializing Jesus Christ, while others such as United Methodists believe the sacrament moves far beyond this notion and see it as an opportunity to connect to the living Christ. Some traditions believe that the essence of the bread (or Host) and the wine change to become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ (transubstantiation), or that they retain both their essential condition as bread and wine but add on the essence of Jesus Christ (consubstantiation). So what do United Methodists believe?

Holy Communion as a Means of Grace

As with almost everything else, United Methodists believe that Holy Communion is a gift of God’s grace to the universal Church. Holy Communion is one of two sacraments (along with baptism), and it is considered to be a means of grace, one of the means by which God chooses to impart grace to people of faith (along with practices like Bible study, prayer, and fasting).

The communion table represents the table at the “great heavenly banquet” around which all Christians will gather when the Reign of God comes in all its fullness. Around it will be the great cloud of witnesses – the faithful believers who have lived and died before us. And this banquet table is indeed an open one, with Jesus Christ serving as the host and folks like you and me present as guests. Children are welcome at this table, just as they are at the table in the home. The table is “extended” when consecrated bread and juice are taken to those who cannot attend worship due to health or other serious reasons. Everyone is included. We are all gathered together to experience the grace and hope offered to us by the love of God the Father, according to the life, death, and resurrection of God the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Wesleyan Roots Session 8: More than a Memory—Meeting God at the Table

The Roots of Christ's Real Presence at an Open Table

There are two primary Wesleyan roots when it comes to Holy Communion. The first is the **open table** at which everyone is welcome. Our communion liturgy begins with this Invitation (Hymnal pg. 12): "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another."

Our open table is a reflection of all the ways we understand grace. Christ invites us to the communion table before we even know the depth of Christ's love (prevenient grace), when we claim it deeply as our own (justifying grace), and as we seek to grow and be made perfect in love (sanctifying grace). So many people have been made to feel unworthy to come to the table and shamed for their sin. It is important to note that we believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is the gift that redeems us and that all are invited into this grace-filled relationship. No one who desires to participate will be turned away!

With that said, it is important to note that accountability and grace have always been connected in our Wesleyan heritage. We are called to sincerely confess our sin before God prior to receiving Holy Communion. While this is done privately with a priest in some traditions, in the UMC we pray a corporate prayer of confession, followed by a time of silent confession, prior to receiving Holy Communion.

It is important to understand our United Methodist beliefs concerning what happens during Holy Communion. For example, while we believe that the bread and juice of Holy Communion remain bread and juice, we also believe that Christ is truly present in the sacrament. This is called **real presence**, and it is an adaptation of an understanding from ancient Christian traditions. While Roman Catholics believe Christ is really present in the Host and the wine as it is essentially changed to the body and blood of Christ, United Methodists believe that Christ's real presence is with us at communion, but that the way in which that happens is a holy mystery.

Consider these words which are spoken at our "Great Thanksgiving," referred to as the epiclesis: "Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood." ¹

These holy words offer us the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit and to be one holy, redeemed people. They are essential for entering into the holy mystery and opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. With this said, I urge you to expect something when you receive Holy Communion. You are meeting God at that table, and you will not leave without being changed for the better.

Marsha Engle Middleton

¹ *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. P. 38.

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Holy Communion is a sacrament offering us an opportunity to experience the real spiritual presence of Christ in a unique way.
 - All people have access to Holy Communion within the United Methodist tradition. You do not need to be United Methodist, nor a member of another church, to respond to the invitation.
 - Holy Communion is a means of grace to us, serving as a conduit of God's love and mercy which we then can extend to others.
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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How do you understand Holy Communion? Do you experience the presence of God in the sacrament, or is it more of a memorial service to you?
 - What difference might it make in your experience of Holy Communion if you approached the table expecting God to be present?
 - How important is the “open table” to you? How would you describe this Wesleyan understanding to a non-Wesleyan friend or family member?
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What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 9: Social Holiness—Moving Toward Perfect Love

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer (5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 9 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, adapted from the prayer "For Courage to Do Justice," #456 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, written by Alan Paton of South Africa.

O Lord, open our eyes that we may see the needs of others; open our ears that we may hear their cries; open our hearts so that they need not be without succor; let us not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong, or afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich. Show us where love and hope and faith are needed, and use us to bring them to those places. And so open our eyes and our ears that we may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee. Amen.

Session 9 Introduction and Video (15 minutes)

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

- "In these words, or in your own words, say: 'Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Joshua Manning. He will talk about the Wesleyan concept of social holiness, and how we are called to love others as Jesus loved.'"
- 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 26:31-46 (15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our first scripture for Session 9 is Matthew 25: 31-46. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage.

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- In these, or your own words, say: "This passage is one in which Jesus links our salvation with how we treat others. Wesley names our call to love others as Jesus loved **social holiness**, and it is at the heart of Wesleyan Christianity as part of our sanctification. The author identifies three things that are particularly striking to her.

Wesleyan Roots Session 9: Social Holiness–Moving Toward Perfect Love

- First, Jesus cares about the small, seemingly inconsequential things we do for others, and not only about the large things. Secondly, the “sheep” in the passage are so accustomed to helping others that they do not seem to be aware they are doing anything special, and they certainly do not think they are doing things for Jesus himself. Thirdly, the “goats” in the passage seem to imply that, if they had only known that Jesus was present in the regular folks needing help, they would have been sure to render aid. Jesus sums everything up in verse 40: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” And in verse 45: “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”
- Ask: “In this passage, the Son of Man judges the nations, and presumably the individuals within, based upon whether or not they acted in mercy towards those in need. Most United Methodists do not focus as much on the judgment of God as we do on the love of God, but accountability for our actions, or lack thereof, is clearly a part of the biblical witness and part of Jesus’ teachings.”
- Ask: “Is it surprising to you that the Son of Man in this passage will judge people according to loving behavior? Why or why not? Is this comforting to you, challenging to you, or both? Why?”
- Ask: “What are some ways in which you might be called to embody social holiness by acting in justice and mercy towards others? If you did so, how do you think you might grow in your relationship with God?”
- Ask: “Has God ever called you to do something outside of your comfort zone? Did you choose to do it or not? If a Christian chooses to move outside of his or her comfort zone to love others, how might that impact the one receiving the loving action? How might that impact the one offering the loving action?”

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- When you think of holiness, do you tend to think of a Christian’s personal lifestyle, of social holiness, or of both? Why?
- How might God be calling you to move toward social holiness in ways both big and small? What might be a first step for you as you seek to love as Jesus loved?
- In your opinion, how important is the connection within The United Methodist Church? What are some additional ways in which our connection empowers us to do more ministry together than we could do as individual Christians or as individual congregations?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, “Session 9 is about John Wesley’s notion of social holiness and how it influences our lives as Christians. I encourage you to read the session guide prior to us getting together next week.”
- In these or similar words say, “Session 10 is about personal piety – how we can allow God to feed our souls through spiritual practices. 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 9 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 #584 and let us read together the words of the hymn, “Lord, You Give the Great Commission.”

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Living as a Christian means, in part, that we are called to demonstrate Christ’s love through intentional Christian actions of mercy and justice.
- While we cannot do everything for everyone, we can do something for someone.
- Social holiness is a part of sanctification and the Christian life.
- The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church makes it possible for us to do more together than any individual person or congregation can do on its own.



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Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 9: Social Holiness—Moving Toward Perfect Love

Personal and Social Holiness

Some Christian traditions put a great deal of focus on personal holiness and do not seem to emphasize **social holiness**. In other words, Christians in these traditions are taught to pray, keep the Ten Commandments, and maintain focus on God rather than on the things of earthly life. United Methodists believe that we are called to extend the concept of holiness beyond ourselves, demonstrating Christ's love with acts of justice and mercy to our neighbors. This way of being is an extension of our personal holiness and connected to our belief that all are called to love as Jesus Christ loved (Christian Perfection). This focus can be seen in how we invest our time, energy, and financial resources.

Loving God's people in Big and Small Ways

While we can't do everything for everyone, we can do something for someone. As a United Methodist Christian, I look around and see so much need. Sometimes it all seems overwhelming to me as I do not have adequate time, energy, knowledge, or resources to address even a fraction of the needs of our hurting world. When I experience this sense of inadequacy, I remind myself of two things.

First, God loves me and the Christ in me is called to love and serve in the world]. I've long had interest and skill in relating to grieving people. I currently serve as a volunteer chaplain with my local police department, and this makes me available to respond to complicated death calls when a clergy presence is especially needed. I have the opportunity to work with officers and their families and am empowered to express God's love to people of all religions or no religion at all. I officiate funeral and memorial services for those who have no church home, no religious tradition, or for those whose religious tradition will not provide this service for them due to a complex situation surrounding the death. I am often pulled out of my comfort-zone. It is only by God's grace that I have been able to serve in this way in my community. God calls me to bring a sense of dignity into the worst moments of people's

lives, and I trust God's holiness is being planted in the lives of others.

Secondly, I invite the churches I serve to partner with the worldwide United Methodist Church to make a larger scale difference in the world. When we pool our connectional resources together, we do more ministry on a larger scale than my small contribution could ever do on its own. This can be experienced through advocacy and personal financial contributions. A great example of our collective ministry together is the United Methodist Committee on Relief. When there is a natural disaster or other tragedy in the world, the United Methodist Committee on Relief assesses and responds to the immediate and long-term needs. 100% of my contribution to UMCOR following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina went toward that specific cause. This is because UMCOR is organized and dispatched through The United Methodist Church.

The Wesleyan Root of Social Holiness

Indeed, the biblical witness is clear that God calls us to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world. In Matthew 5:1–14 we read that God blesses those who are merciful and those who are makers of peace, and that we are called to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Continuing through the gospel, we read that we are called to love and pray for our enemies (5:43–44), refrain from judging others (7:1–2), forgive others (18:21–22), and love our neighbors as ourselves (22:39). In Matthew 25:31–46, as Jesus states that insofar as we offer food, drink, hospitality, clothes, and a healing and loving presence to others, so we have offered those things to him. I could go on, and these are just in the gospel of Matthew.

John Wesley taught that Christians are called to demonstrate Christ's love with acts of mercy and justice. This is a part of God's work of sanctification in our lives.

Wesleyan Roots Session 9: Social Holiness—Moving Toward Perfect Love

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the Board of Church and Society for The United Methodist Church, states, “United Methodists have a long commitment to social holiness. It is in our DNA. It is part of who we are. Wesley has said, ‘There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social.’ Wesley goes on to say that without social holiness, we cannot exist. It is because of God’s love for us and Christ’s love that we reach out into the world to walk with others and to accompany them in their journeys... We walk with those who are poor, those who are vulnerable, those who live on the margins of life. It is a gift that God has given us and we have claimed as Methodists who are committed to social holiness; that we would be with one another in this journey as we live our lives together.”¹

In the early 1900s virtually all public and private hospitals were located north of Interstate 30 in the city of Dallas, Texas. Concerned about this underserved population, Methodist ministers and civic leaders established Methodist Hospital of Dallas. A 100-bed facility opened on Christmas Eve, 1927, to adequately serve the health needs on the southern end of the city. While the UMC no longer directly operates or funds these hospitals, we do participate in their ministry to the community through the Golden Cross community clinics, the hospital system’s Board of Directors, volunteers, and in other important ways.

Indeed, United Methodists, and Methodists preceding them, are active in countless ministries of outreach on behalf of Jesus Christ including ministries providing food, clean drinking water, shelter, early childhood education and intervention, disaster relief, and many others. Methodists have led the way in higher education by establishing undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate level colleges and universities throughout the United States and beyond. We have historically led church and society initiatives for child welfare, racial justice, women’s rights, just immigration, housing equality, wage equity, safe working conditions, and more.

Social Holiness in Uncertain Times

God calls us to social holiness in small ways, and in greater ways that we can only do together. We live in uncertain times dealing with global pandemic, political upheaval, systemic racism, and economic instability. While my comfort-zone is challenged by my work as a Chaplain, and I may be tempted to keep all my financial resources to myself, my faith calls me to love like Christ and understand that human need only increases in times like this. Our personal holiness must extend to social holiness if we are in Christ. I urge you to consider how you might, in ways big and small, partner with the work of the Holy Spirit so that the fullness of Christ love (sanctification) will be known on earth as it is in heaven.

Marsha Engle Middleton

¹ www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-social-holiness

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Living as a Christian means, in part, that we are called to demonstrate Christ's love through intentional Christian actions of mercy and justice.
 - While we cannot do everything for everyone, we can do something for someone.
 - Social holiness is part of sanctification and the Christian life.
 - The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church makes it possible for us to do more together than any individual person or congregation can do on its own.
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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- When you think of holiness, do you tend to think of a Christian's personal lifestyle, of social holiness, or of both? Why?
 - How might God be calling you to move toward social holiness in ways both big and small? What might be a first step for you as you seek to love as Jesus loved?
 - How important, do you think, is the connection within The United Methodist Church? What are some additional ways in which our connection empowers us to do more ministry together than we could do as individual Christians or as individual congregations?
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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

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

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.



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Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 10: Spiritual Practices for Soul-Hungry Christians

A Coming of Age in my Relationship with God

My parents taught me to pray as a young child; we prayed before every meal and had an extended prayer time before bed. I always had the sense that God heard my prayers and that proved to be a great comfort to me.

Over the years, I tried various programs to read the Bible in a year. I also tried to keep up with Sunday School and youth group lessons and do any assigned reading we had been asked to complete, and all the while I sensed that God did indeed hear my prayers – although I did not always receive the answers for which I was hoping.

My prayer and devotional life changed drastically in the summer of 1993. I was an ordained elder, appointed as a lead pastor to a church in Richardson, Texas. While serving as a counselor at our conference's senior high camp, I received word that my mother had been in a horrible motor vehicle accident. I rushed from our conference center in Bridgeport, Texas, to the Greenville hospital before the helicopter air-lifted my mom to Dallas. By God's grace, I made it to Greenville just in time to see my mother before she was loaded onto the helicopter. The situation was grave. As a trained hospital chaplain, I knew how chaplains and other hospital staff related to loved ones of patients who had little hope of survival and my experience was all too familiar. I tried to cope with the shock while helping my dad understand the gravity of the situation. It was perhaps the most frightening day of my life. I cried out to God, literally, not caring that others might see me or hear me. I prayed regularly to God, but I rarely felt a desperate need for God's presence. I learned that day I did not have to "have it together" for God to hear me and respond to my need. I started out that morning as a young adult who was somewhat naïve about human suffering. I ended that day as a more mature adult, making life-and-death decisions on the part of a woman whom I loved dearly and still depended upon greatly.

The next several months were challenging due to my mother's long-term stay in the Intensive Care Unit. It

seemed that God was continually present through my dad and the spiritual care of my congregation. General acts of piety were a part of my continual prayer life. I sang hymns at my mom's bedside, read scripture, and even prepared for her memorial service. She died in September, the day before my birthday and ten days after we made the decision to remove her from life support.

As I look back on that time, I realize that the spiritual practices and disciplines that I had learned connected me deeply to God. I felt the Holy Spirit lead me through a dangerous, unfamiliar wilderness, and offer me peace and wisdom. God certainly sustained me, and it seemed my every need was provided for during that traumatic time. I am certain that all of this was part of God's provision for me and for my dad. The spiritual disciplines that I so desperately employed during that long summer have become the center of my life.

Works of Piety for Wesleyans

It is important for Wesleyan Christians to understand what we mean by the term **piety**. In a secular sense, when I think of someone being pious, I think of someone who acts "holier-than-thou" or who behaves as if she or he is better than other people. In our context, piety simply refers to our reverence for God; therefore, acts of piety are actions that enhance our relationship with God. We sometimes call these spiritual disciplines. There are many works of piety a person can experience, and one of the ones with which we are most familiar is prayer.

In Luke 18:9-14 we read: "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying,

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

'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you; this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'"

In this passage, the Pharisee might represent piety in a more secular context, while the tax collector might represent piety in a Wesleyan sense. Indeed, the more we can approach God honestly and openly, without pretense, the more authentic our relationship with God will become.

Around 1729, John's brother Charles Wesley (the great hymn writer) began to meet with a group of like-minded faculty and students at Oxford. They soon invited John to participate as well. They practiced spiritual disciplines together and separately, and held one another accountable for their Bible study, prayer, fasting, intentionality about receiving Holy Communion, and their work amongst the poor and imprisoned populations. Others derided them, calling them names to make fun of them: the "Holy Club," "Bible Moths," and "Methodists;" thus, the name of our denomination sprang from a small group of people intentionally practicing spiritual disciplines according to a method!

As the movement progressed, John and Charles Wesley demonstrated by preaching and by practice their belief that **works of mercy** (works of social holiness from Session 9), and **works of piety** (spiritual practices) were essential for a Christian's life of faith. A particularly striking characteristic of John was his humility when it came to living out his relationship with God through Jesus Christ.¹ According to Charles Yrigoyen in *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*: "One of the most impressive things about John Wesley was his struggle to become the person he thought God wanted him to be, someone who was holy in heart and life. He was not a Christian theologian and church leader who lived above the world's conflicts and turmoil. He was realistic about the obstacles, doubts, failures, and crises with which faithful people must cope... He was aware that the Christian life has its peaks and valleys."²

John Wesley was especially interested in Christians receiving the "means of grace," special conduits through

which God's grace was made especially available to people (see Session 8). These included searching the scriptures, prayer, fasting, receiving Holy Communion, participating in Christian conferencing, and attending public worship.³ This is as true for us today as it was for the folks in The Holy Club in 1729. Acts of mercy and acts of piety all have their place among the means of grace.

Spiritual Practices for Soul-Hungry Christians

Times are tough, and our culture is going through a particularly tumultuous time. We faithful Christians wonder where God is in the midst of everything we see on the news. We are soul-hungry. We long for something solid in the midst of a world that seems to continually shift beneath us.

There are many resources we can use to strengthen our prayer life and Bible study. There are resources about ways to practice fasting (from food as well as from other things, i.e. social media, careless spending, bad language, etc.). Most of us have access to corporate worship and Holy Communion. Christian conferencing occurs anytime Christians intentionally gather to learn about God and scripture, to plan ministry, or to encourage one another in areas of spiritual growth. Covenant groups, or accountability groups, are particularly powerful ways in which a Christians can conference together and grow in faith while supporting others in their spiritual journeys.

The Daily Examen

The spiritual discipline that has perhaps meant the most to me is the practice of daily examen, which is a daily examination of my life with God. Christians from all over the world have used forms of examen for centuries. My practice is very simple. I set aside a daily time with God. As I begin my time, I take out a notebook and answer a few questions about the day. Here is what I currently ask myself:

1. When was I closest to Christ today?
2. How was I called to live out my discipleship today?
3. When was I not faithful to God, others, or myself today?
4. What good did I do today?
5. What are three things for which I am especially grateful from this day?⁴

¹ wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/

² Yrigoyen, Jr. Charles. *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*. New York: General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, 1996. p. 28.

³ Yrigoyen, p. 29-37.

⁴ My practice of daily examen originated from questions associated with the Reunion Groups of the spiritual retreat known as the Walk to Emmaus, sponsored by The Upper Room. You can learn more about the Walk to Emmaus at <https://emmaus.upperroom.org>. Additional questions for personal examen may be found in the following: Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsityPress, 2015. Pp. 59 ff; and The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003. Pp. 91 ff.

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

The answers do not need to be long. The purpose of this practice is to nurture my relationship with Christ and grow in my discipleship. I vary my spiritual disciplines a little every year so they stay fresh and interesting while they challenge me to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in my journey of sanctification.

My desperate need for God following my mother's accident and subsequent death deepened my faith and led

me to practices that have enriched my life. I believe we cannot navigate our way through confusing and downright frightening times successfully without a deep relationship with God. Perhaps we do not realize how soul-hungry we are until we find ourselves truly having to lean on God.

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.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- 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, and a Wesleyan covenant group? Which one of these might you begin practicing first? What would be your first step in getting started?
- How can God work through a group of people who are all practicing spiritual disciplines together?



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 11: Teaching and Learning in the United Methodist Spirit

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 11 Participants' Guide with them. Provide a copy for any participants who did not bring their own.
- Words for the closing liturgy of this session are printed in the Participants' Guide for Session 11. These words are usually set to the tune of "Ode to Joy" or "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" and may be sung rather or read.
- Lead the group in an opening prayer of your own, or you can use this prayer adapted from the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).¹

Good and Gracious God, You have called us to the teaching ministry of the church. We pray for all ministries of Christian education, and for churches and denominations around the world. We pray for those who study, and we lift before you those who give of their time, talent, and treasure to help themselves and others grow in discipleship. Lord God, we recommit ourselves to this common ministry. We thank you for vacation Bible schools, Bible studies, Sunday school classes, small groups, and other means that afford your people opportunity to pause and learn more of you. Lord, we confess that we have not always focused ourselves on your word and your way as you have called us to. Refocus us when we become unfocused, cause us to pause and consider the calling that you have placed on us, and remind us that you have equipped us for the work you have assigned to us. Empower and inspire us by your Holy Spirit. With our hearts, souls, and minds, we seek to serve you. We pray this prayer in the name of the master teacher, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Session 11 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

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

- "In these words, or in your own words, say: "Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Deniece Mason. She will talk about the importance of what we teach in our congregations."

- 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: 1 Timothy 2:8-15

(15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our first scripture for Session 11 is 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Listen for God's word to you."
- Read the passage.

I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; 9also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

- Say: "In this passage from 1 Timothy, Rev. Mason pointed out that the text puts strict limitations on what a woman can say, particularly to men (or to their 'husbands,' depending upon the translation). There are other instructions here as well. Perhaps the most difficult part of this passage is where the author states that women will be saved through bearing children. Clearly, this portion of scripture is a point of pain to many women and couples who long for children."
- In Session 5, the author states that the "Bible is our primary source of revelation insofar as it is read as a whole, in context, by a thinking adult. She also warns against the temptation of "proof texting" – that is, the tendency to pull a single verse or two from scripture to prove a point one is trying to make, regardless of the context of those verses.

¹ <https://ameced.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-Prayer-for-Christian-Education.pdf>

Wesleyan Roots Session 11: Teaching and Learning in the United Methodist Spirit

- Which of the following portions of the text (if any) do you think, are contextual to the author's place and time in history? Which portions (if any) apply to us directly today in our place and time?
 - Men should lift their hands when they pray
 - Men should not be angry or argumentative when they pray
 - Women should dress modestly and decently in suitable clothing
 - Women should not braid their hair
 - Women should not wear gold or pearls
 - Women should learn in silence in full submission
 - Women are not to teach or have authority over men
 - Women are to keep silent
 - Women experience salvation through having children
- Ask: "Are you aware of Christian traditions or denominations that teach a part of the rules in the list from 1 Timothy, but not all of them? If so, which rules do they tend to emphasize? Which rules do they tend to dismiss? Why do you think some are emphasized and some are dismissed?"
- Say "In other Pauline writings, Paul lifts up the names of women as well as men who have served alongside him. At least one of these women is referred to as a "deacon" or "minister" (Romans 16: 1 – 16), and presumably these women would speak in carrying out their ministry with others. In Galatians 3: 27-28, Paul states, 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'"
- Ask: "When pieces of scripture from the same author, or reflecting the same author's understanding, contradict each other, how can Christians understand their meaning? How might the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" explained in Session 5 be helpful in this instance?"
- Say: "In all four Gospel accounts, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was discovered by women at the tomb. Either an angel meeting them (in Matthew, Mark, and Luke), or the resurrected Jesus himself (in John), instructed the women to 'go and tell' others about the resurrection."
- Ask: "Why might God have entrusted women to share the 'gospel' or good news of the resurrected Jesus? How do these passages align, or fail to align, with the passage in 1 Timothy?"

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- How might you handle a sharp difference of opinion on a point of Christian faith? Are you comfortable having conversations with others with whom you disagree? Do you think discussing differences in our perspectives of faith is a good thing or not? Why?
- In what ways do you think God might be calling your local congregation to return to its Wesleyan roots? What is a first step you can take to help bring this about?
- Does your congregation make use of United Methodist Sunday School curriculum, youth materials, Bible studies, and the like? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is worth the effort to locate Wesleyan-oriented materials for your local congregation? Why or why not?

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, "Session 12 is about how we can live our lives and lead our congregations with hope rather than despair. 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 11 in the box at the bottom of your session guide. This session has five identity points. Let's read these out loud together.
- Say, "Please turn your session 11 participants' guide to the last page, and let us read/sing together the words of the hymn, "God of Wisdom, Truth, and Beauty" written by Presbyterian hymn writer Jane Parker Huber (These words are usually set to the tune of "Ode to Joy" or "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" and may be sung or read).

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Different Christian traditions emphasize different points of view on a variety of Christian beliefs and practices. Generally, United Methodist Churches bless their communities with rich Wesleyan roots by focusing their Christian education efforts on Wesleyan material.
- Seekers, newer Christians, children, and youth may not realize there are varying perspectives when it comes to Christian education.
- Christians are called to read the Bible for themselves and to learn as much as they can about the Christian faith. It is good for Christians, especially mature Christians, to learn about other faith traditions and varying points of view.
- Even though we may differ from other faith traditions, United Methodists treat others with respect and honor the rights of others to believe differently than we do.
- We help pass on the legacy of our Wesleyan Roots when our congregations use curriculum and other materials that come from a Wesleyan perspective.

Closing Liturgy

"God of Wisdom, Truth, and Beauty," Hymn lyrics by Jane Parker Huber ²

God of wisdom, truth, and beauty, God of spirit, fire, and soul;
God of order, love, and duty, God of purpose, plan, and goal
Grant us visions ever growing, Breath of life, eternal strength;
Mystic spirit, moving, flowing, Filling height and depth and length.
God of drama, music, dancing, God of story, sculpture, art;
God of wit, all life enhancing, God of every yearning heart;
Challenge us with quests of spirit, Truth revealed in myriad ways'
Word or song for hearts that hear it, Sketch and model forms of praise.
God of atom's smallest feature, God of galaxies in space;
God of every living creature, God of all the human race;
May our knowledge be extended for the whole creation's good.
Hunger banished, warfare ended, All the earth a neighborhood.
God of science, history, teaching, God of futures yet unknown;
God of holding, God of reaching, God of power beyond each throne;
Take the fragments of our living, fit us to your finest scheme.
Now forgiven and forgiving, Make us free to dare and dream.

² Huber, Jane Parker. *A Singing Faith*. Nashville: Westminster John Knox Press, Illustrated Edition 1987).



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 11: Teaching and Learning in the United Methodist Spirit

United Methodist Congregations Do Well to Teach Wesleyan Beliefs and Practices

By now I suspect that you probably understand something about the distinctiveness of Wesleyan Christianity. We have discussed the concept of grace and how it manifests as prevenient grace when it goes before us, bringing us to an awareness of our need for God. We have investigated the Wesleyan emphases within the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the role of free will in the United Methodist understanding of Christianity. We have seen how Wesleyans make conscious use of the “reading glasses” of tradition, experience, and reason when considering their primary source of scripture. Looking at the Wesleyan way of salvation as more of a process than an event, we have seen how prevenient grace by virtue of the Holy Spirit empowers us to say “yes” to a relationship with Jesus Christ (justification), and then to growth in faith (sanctification) until such a point in time where we might become perfect in love. We have seen how United Methodists are called to be diverse by intent rather than by default, how we share together in the real presence of God at an open communion table, and how we are called to both social holiness through our love and care for others, as well as personal holiness through the practice of spiritual disciplines. There is much richness here, and that is why United Methodists are called to pass on our heritage to others.

Different Christian Traditions Emphasize Different Things

The Church of Jesus Christ – the Church that includes all Christian denominations and traditions – is charged with the responsibility of teaching the Christian faith (Matthew 28: 18 – 20). But different denominations teach different things. It is only natural that a non-denominational congregation, a Baptist congregation, a United Methodist congregation, and all others will differ in the specifics of what they teach, and that is generally a good thing. I believe it is important for United Methodist congregations to generally teach from a Wesleyan perspective. Although this might sound obvious, in my

experience some folks find it is easier to order materials online from popular authors, or perhaps drop by their local Bible bookstore to pick up Sunday School curriculum. The issue is that not all books and curricula stem from our Wesleyan roots. To locate books, videos, and curricula that highlight our Wesleyan Roots it is often necessary to access materials related to the United Methodist Church, or to a handful of other publishers who lean toward a Wesleyan point-of-view.

Why the Curriculum Taught in Your Church Matters

The curriculum taught in your local church matters. The Sunday School lessons, Bible studies, books, and video resources are especially important when it comes to people who are new to the Christian faith, children, and younger youth. Often our churches include adults who have not yet learned that there are significant differences between Christian denominations, and who may have no idea that Wesleyan Christianity would handle some topics much differently than other traditions.

Consider what is at stake here. I am an adult, well-versed and educated in theology, so if I attend a local UMC and discover they are not teaching from a Wesleyan perspective, I can handle it. I sift through what I hear, keeping what I think is appropriate for my faith and discarding the rest. Children and some others would not have the same filters available to them.

Sound teaching that reflects our Wesleyan roots also provides us with a solid foundation, equipping us to live out our faith in ways that are consistent with our theology. When we are mature and well-formed in our faith, we are better able to interpret scripture or to respond thoughtfully to statements like “everything happens for a reason.” The ability to put our faith into action in meaningful, day-to-day ways is key to following Christ – whether we’re children, youth, or adults.

But What About Being Exposed to Different Points of View?

I want to be clear that just because something is not published by The United Methodist Church or a related Wesleyan denomination does not mean we should not learn from it. We are called to read the Bible and to learn about Christianity for ourselves. We are to think and learn to be comfortable with questions that may have different answers depending on the source. As we mature in faith, we are also called to be more comfortable with ambiguity, for there is much in scripture that we will not understand in this life. For voracious readers and long-term United Methodists, if all we are exposed to is Wesleyan material, we may not notice some of the differences between Wesleyan content and content from other Christian traditions. Plus, we would miss out on some good reading material and opportunities for spiritual growth. I am inspired by many non-Methodist writers: The late Madeleine L'Engle was Episcopalian. Richard Rohr is Roman Catholic. N.T. Wright is an Anglican Bishop. Barbara Brown Taylor is an Episcopal priest. Gordon MacDonald is a retired pastor from the Reformed tradition, and although I would differ from him on many points of faith, he has written some of my favorite books to read when I need a spiritual boost.¹ When I come across a point of disagreement with any author, I simply make a mental note of it, then move on to see what I can learn.

Our Congregations Are Called to Take Great Care with the Curriculum, Books, and Other Materials It Presents to People

Generally speaking I believe United Methodist Churches are more closely tied to our Wesleyan roots when we use Wesleyan resources. When we use Wesleyan materials for Christian education, we reinforce the distinctive aspects of our Wesleyan Christianity. We have an opportunity to emphasize aspects of our Wesleyan identity, including our focus on grace; loving God rather than being afraid of God; being created with genuine free will; reading scripture through lenses of tradition, experience, and reason; salvation as more of a process than an event; prevenient grace; a Wesleyan understanding of baptism; justification; sanctification; perfection in love; diversity; an open communion table; social holiness; and personal piety. Much of what we love the most about the United Methodist Church is represented here, and it is important that these concepts are preached and taught about regularly.

How To Choose

There is a lot of Christian material available for purchase and sorting through it can be confusing. Here are a few things to consider as you select curricula and other media for your United Methodist congregation. Resources are more likely to align with our Wesleyan roots when you can answer the following questions affirmatively:

- Do the lesson plans invite participation from the learners?
- Is allowance made for leaders/facilitators to adapt and adjust the material depending on context?
- Does God seek for the reconciliation of all creation and invite human participation into this mission?
- Is salvation portrayed as a gift of grace that has both present and a future aspects?
- Is God portrayed as loving, gracious, and desiring a relationship with human beings?
- Is God's grace is more powerful than the power of sin?
- Is the crucifixion of Jesus part of God's plan for salvation of the world?
- Is it acceptable for a learner/participant to ask questions or disagree with the material or the instructor/facilitator?

Resources are less likely to align with our Wesleyan roots if they:

- Pose primarily fact-based answers, with no real thinking or application required.
- Convey salvation as a work we must achieve, and which happens only after this life.
- Center sin as the defining aspect of our relationship with God.
- Describe the world only as sinful and hostile.
- Present Jesus' death as the sacrifice to appease God's wrath.
- Present the Bible as inerrant, without any textual issues.
- Present baptism as being only for adult believers² and propose that the water must be used in certain ways for the baptism to "count."
- Present communion as only a memorial service?

While it may be convenient to make a quick run to the local Bible bookstore to pick up Sunday School material, Wesleyan Christians are wise to do some research first. The United Methodist Publishing House and a number of other publishers approach their curriculum, Bible studies,

1 Here is my favorite: MacDonald, Gordon. *Ordering Your Private World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Revised 2017. I try to revisit this book every year.

2. Adapted from the "United Methodist Curricula Checklist" published by Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church. Available at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/united-methodist-curricula-checklist>

Wesleyan Roots Session 11: Teaching and Learning in the United Methodist Spirit

books, and videos from a Wesleyan point of view, and it is worth our time to check out what they have available. I believe it is fair to expect that a United Methodist Church would generally make use of Christian educational materials with a Wesleyan perspective. We are called to emphasize our Wesleyan roots faithfully, not only so generations to come can experience the rich depth of Wesleyan

Christianity, but also because folks – right now – need to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ in the most relevant way possible: the Wesleyan way.

Marsha Engle Middleton

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Living as a Christian means, in part, that we are called to demonstrate Christ's love through intentional Christian actions of mercy and justice.
- While we cannot do everything for everyone, we can do something for someone.
- Social holiness is part of sanctification and the Christian life.
- The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church makes it possible for us to do more together than any individual person or congregation can do on its own.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- When you think of holiness, do you tend to think of a Christian's personal lifestyle, of social holiness, or of both? Why?
- How might God be calling you to move toward social holiness in ways both big and small? What might be a first step for you as you seek to love as Jesus loved?
- How important, do you think, is the connection within The United Methodist Church? What are some additional ways in which our connection empowers us to do more ministry together than we could do as individual Christians or as individual congregations?

Closing Liturgy:

"God of Wisdom, Truth, and Beauty," Hymn lyrics by Jane Parker Huber

*God of wisdom, truth, and beauty, God of spirit, fire, and soul; God of order, love, and duty, God of purpose, plan, and goal
Grant us visions ever growing, Breath of life, eternal strength; Mystic spirit, moving, flowing, Filling height and depth and length.
God of drama, music, dancing, God of story, sculpture, art; God of wit, all life enhancing, God of every yearning heart;
Challenge us with quests of spirit, Truth revealed in myriad ways; Word or song for hearts that hear it, Sketch and model forms of
praise. God of atom's smallest feature, God of galaxies in space; God of every living creature, God of all the human race;
May our knowledge be extended for the whole creation's good. Hunger banished, warfare ended, All the earth a neighborhood.
God of science, history, teaching, God of futures yet unknown; God of holding, God of reaching, God of power beyond each throne;
Take the fragments of our living, fit us to your finest scheme. Now forgiven and forgiving, Make us free to dare and dream.*



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 12: Living and Leading with Hope in Uncertain Times

Gathering, Introductions and Prayer

(5 Minutes)

- Check to be sure everyone in the group brought a copy of the Session 12 Participants' Guide with them. Provide a copy for any participants who did not bring their own.
- 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 adapted from the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila by Joyce Rupp.¹

(Take a few moments of silence at the beginning of your prayer)

Let nothing disturb me, nothing frighten me. Let nothing take away my peace. May I wait with trust, with patience, knowing you will provide for me. I lack for nothing in you, God. You are my strong foundation. You are enough for me. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Session 12 Introduction and Video

(15 minutes)

- In these words, or in your own words, say: "Today's presenter on our video is Rev. Chris Yost. He will talk about living and leading with hope in uncertain times."
- 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: Revelation 21:1-7

(15 Minutes)

- Say, "Our scripture passage for Session 12 is Revelation 21:1-7."
- Read the passage.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." 5And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. 7Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

- In these words, or in your own words, say: "In this passage from Revelation, we read about the John's vision of the Reign of God in its fulfillment. Revelation is one example of apocalyptic writing in the Bible, along with portions of the book of Daniel, portions of Matthew, and others. The author of Wesleyan Roots thinks that the vision from Revelation 21:1-7 is a word-picture of how the Reign of God will be after it is brought to fulfillment.
- As time passed for the first Christians, people became concerned because some of them began to die and Jesus had not returned as they had expected. Paul wrote to assure them that all Christians would meet Jesus at the appointed time, not only those who were alive but also those who had already died (1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 18). Here and in other writings, the Pauline tradition implied that the dead in Christ will "rise" to a heavenly realm, and this was in keeping with Greco-Roman thought at the time.

¹ Rupp, Joyce. *The Cup of Our Life: A Guide to Spiritual Growth*. Nitre Dame, Indiana: Sorin Books, 2012.

Wesleyan Roots Session 12: Living and Leading with Hope in Uncertain Times

- Ask: "How do you picture heaven? What do you think happens to Christians at the point of our deaths?"
- Say: "The Bible depicts several ideas of what happens to Christians after physical death but gives very little detail about what heaven is like. Some scripture states that our bodies, in some form, are resurrected to meet God (1 Corinthians 15:35-44) and implies that this resurrection of the dead will happen after Christ's return. Other scripture implies that deceased people of faith encounter Jesus at the point of death (Luke 23: 39-43) and whether or not a body is included is not addressed."
- Ask: "Why do you think the Bible depicts different ideas about what happens to a Christian at the point of death?"
- Say: "In Revelation 21 we see something really different. Instead of Christians going up to meet God in heaven, heaven comes down to meet Christians on Earth. Verses 3-4 state, 'And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'"
- Ask: Do you think of heaven as being up in the cosmos, within us in our hearts, on Earth as the New Jerusalem, or somewhere else?
- Where in the Wesleyan roots do you find the most hope? What is one way you can share this hope with others?
- Have you thought through your own story of faith? Take an opportunity to think about and plan a thirty-second "elevator speech" in which you describe it to another. Do you believe God will provide you an opportunity to use it in real life? Do you think you have the courage to put it to use?
- Out of all the Wesleyan roots named in this study, which one is most important to your own life of faith? Which ones were surprising? Name one new thing you learned about the United Methodist approach to Christianity. If anything was confusing, please reach out to a pastor or friend who is familiar with the United Methodist theological tradition. Remember that we are a body that is open to asking questions, talking things over with others, and thinking through our faith.

United Methodist Identity Points and Closing Liturgy (5 Minutes)

- In these or similar words say, "Session 12 was about how we can live our lives, and lead others, with hope rather than despair. The session also reviewed the Wesleyan roots covered in previous sessions. Let us read aloud together the four United Methodist Identity Points from Session 12 in the box at the bottom of your session guide."
- Say, "Please turn your hymnal to #881 (or #882, whichever one with which your participants are most familiar). Let us stand as we are able and read together the words of the Apostle's Creed, as we remind ourselves of the aspects of faith we share with Christians from all traditions."

Marsha Engle Middleton

Questions for Prayerful and Thoughtful Discussion (15 Minutes)

- Think of a time in your life when you were in need of hope. How did God show up in your situation?

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Christians can have hope, even in hard times, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- Christian hope is deeply connected to the concept of the kingdom, or reign, of God. United Methodists focus not only on the future fulfillment of God's reign, but also on the partial fulfillment of God's reign right now. We are encouraged to participate in making God's reign a reality now by sharing our story of faith with others, by acts of mercy and piety, and by working to bring about peace and justice in our world.
- Because we remember God's faithfulness in the past and can recognize God's work in our present, we can also face the future with hope knowing God will continue to be present with us and with those we love.
- We are all called to leadership in some venue, and our faith can impact how we lead others. Most people come to faith in Jesus Christ one person at a time, so it is important for Christians to be able and willing to share the story of their own faith with others, as well as to do the work of social holiness in the world.



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 12: God is Not Finished Yet—Living and Leading with Hope in Uncertain Times

The Wesleyan Root of Hope

Throughout Christian history, followers of Jesus Christ have needed the power of the Holy Spirit to give them hope and to spur them forward during all kinds of difficulties. Christians have found themselves, both individually and collectively, facing a plethora of painful, threatening challenges because of their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus warned that tough times were coming. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34b). “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man” (Luke 6:22). And “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Jesus was not wrong; indeed, it is easy to understand how a person’s Christian identity can be threatened in the face of difficulties: hatred, poverty, illness, war, death, etc. And yet it is our calling as Christians to be people of hope.

Hope is a practical and theological concept in all Christian traditions – a feeling of trust which leads to an optimistic belief that God is real and present in our lives. Hope assures us that no matter what, God is with us, and we are not alone. This forward-looking orientation provides opportunity and energy to live into our relationship with God more fully. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christ’s intentional followers participate in a life that is different from that of other people. Christians have access to resources that provide guidance, strength, power, and comfort. Specifically, I am talking about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which works like prevenient grace. It is around us even when we are not aware. It justifies us and empowers us to make things right with God and one another. The Holy Spirit also offers us peace and joy which leads to hope.

The Reign of God

Wesleyans share with other Christians the hope embedded in the present and coming reign of God. Examining a broad

sweep of the Judeo-Christian tradition, United Methodists understand the reign of God as being God’s active presence in and involvement with all parts of creation. Note that, because of linguistic tradition in Judaism and traditions surrounding it, “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are almost synonymous in the New Testament, and we tend to use “reign of God,” as used in our Book of Discipline.¹

We can identify several themes with the concept of the **reign of God**. For example, the reign of God fulfills promises from the Old Testament (i.e., Luke 4:16–30). The reign of God typically points to transformation (i.e., Matt. 13:31–33). It involves turning the rules of our world “upside down” as in Matt. 20:16, where “...the last will be first, and the first will be last.” The reign of God breaks down barriers that were previously in place, including people on the margins of society (John 4:22–24). It especially identifies God’s rule as dynamic rather than static, as God’s presence works in the midst of humanity to bring about God’s will, or preferred future, “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

The Reign of God as Past, Present, and Future Reality

One major distinction of Wesleyan Christianity compared to some other Christian traditions has to do with the when of the reign of God more than the what. While some Christian brothers and sisters focus on the reign of God being primarily a future reality, United Methodists tend to understand the reign of God as being already present with us, not yet fully complete, and still to come in all of its fullness.

Living with hope in our present age as Wesleyan Christians begins with remembering God’s faithfulness in the past as we read the Bible, as we learn about the history of God’s people, as we learn about the history of our local congregation, as we learn about the history of our family, and as we remember the stories of our own lives. Both

1 Chilton, Bruce. “Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 3. Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob et. al. eds. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. Pp. 512-523.

Wesleyan Roots Session 12: Living and Leading With Hope in Uncertain Times

it has been expressed in the past puts us on a more secure footing for our present and our future, for our God is trustworthy.

Clearly, the Wesleyan tradition recognizes, honors, and teaches the work God has done in creation and among the created order throughout history, not only after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. God was just as sovereign when the psalmist penned Psalm 96 as when John of Patmos penned Revelation 21:1-7. There are Christian traditions that do not teach much about God's reign prior to Jesus; however, Wesleyans recognize the reign of God as being a reality in the past, even as it is in the present and future. God's presence in our midst is the source of our hope.

Perhaps the dimension in which Wesleyans are most distinct is our understanding of God's reign being a present reality. Believers can trust that God has worked and is continuing to work in the world. Some people examine the state of the world around us and use this as a reason not to acknowledge God. They ask, "How can God even exist with the world being as it currently is?" But remember the discussion from Session 4 on determinism and free will? It is not so much that God caused the deterioration of our reality, but rather that God stands ready to redeem the mess we humans have managed to make in the world around us. Furthermore, God's reign in the present calls us to live out our faith in real and meaningful ways.

When we pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are praying for God to be at work here in this life, and I believe we are called to participate in that present state of the reign of God.

When we love our neighbor, welcome the stranger, comfort those in pain, feed the hungry, stand for justice, share the story of Jesus, and try to make this world a better place, we are blessed to see glimpses of God's reign. We believe God ruled all creation from the very beginning, and that the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ ushered in a new era of God's reign. As such, the Church as the body of Christ is charged with living into a new reality in which God's reign is treated as the reality it is. We are not to sit around waiting until we get to heaven; there is plenty to do right here, right now.

When Christians strive to live in peace and harmony, we are foreshadowing the peace and harmony to which we look forward at the end of the age. When Christians work

to influence public policy that assists the poor, the sick, and people marginalized for any reason, we are living into a heavenly reality in which no one is poor, no one is sick, and no one is excluded. When an individual Christian sits with a grieving person in the name of Jesus Christ, he or she embodies Revelation 21:4, in which "God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

In short, God is not finished yet!

While we are distinct in our Wesleyan belief in the present reality of God's reign, we also find hope in the future reality that is still to come. We see God's kingdom in all its glory called the "fairer worlds on high" in the beloved spiritual "Marching to Zion."² This future state is a necessary complement and continuation of the present reality of God's reign. The prospect of God's future reign gives us hope and motivation to continue our good work today, looking forward to an even better tomorrow.

Although it does not comprise our full understanding of the reign of God, the future reality of God's kingdom also brings peace and hope as we consider the realities of our mortality. The Book of Discipline reminds us that we "rejoice in the promise of everlasting life that overcomes death and the forces of evil," and Jesus told his followers "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26). We repeat these words at funerals and memorials in our Service of Death and Resurrection, serving as a reminder of the promise of eternal life and our assurance of hope to come.

Leading with Hope

We are all called to be hope-filled leaders in our families, our places of work, our places of study, our communities, or our local congregations. It is humbling to realize that others may watch you to learn what it means to be a Christian and a United Methodist. Some people may determine whether Christianity in general, or United Methodism in particular, is something they want to explore based upon how you lead. Rather than being overwhelmed by others looking to us in this way, we can trust our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and lean heavily on grace. "Since grace is God's presence and power preceding our efforts, going before us and with us, Christian leadership is courageous and filled with hope."³

2 Watts, Isaac and Robert Lowry. "Marching to Zion." *The United Methodist Hymnal*, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989, 733.

3 Kenneth L. Carder and Lacey C. Warner. *Grace to Lead: Practicing Leadership in the Wesleyan Tradition (Revised Edition)*. Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2016. p. xvi.

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This type of courageous, hope-filled leadership involves opening our hearts and minds to new ideas, stretching our concept of “neighbor,” and being willing to stand up and speak out when necessary so that the reign of God can come more closely to fruition. At times this means sharing our own story of faith with others. In my experience, people develop relationships with Jesus Christ individually, one person at a time. Our willingness to humbly and gently talk about our relationship with Jesus Christ in appropriate times and places makes opportunity for the Holy Spirit to move not only in our lives but in the lives of others. At other times, we are called by God to the critical work of peace and justice, standing up and speaking out for those who lack a voice in our society. Harold Recinos writes, “The messianic age is with us when we set out to overcome a divided world with love and justice, especially struggling primarily for all those persons who hold onto hope in the midst of despair in a world that takes it away. By walking the Samaritan road and acting compassionately in the world we become signs of the approaching reign of God... The church is good news when it crosses every boundary to become a neighbor to the battered, excluded, and set aside. The church fulfills the promise of God by acting mercifully in the world, defending human rights, and seeking peace and justice for those who suffer at the hands of unjust others.”⁴

Tracing our United Methodist Identity

As we conclude this last session of Wesleyan Roots, I would like to briefly trace the path we have undertaken to arrive at this point. In Unit 1, we covered the Wesleyan roots of grace, prevenient grace, baptism, and free will, all to put language to what God is doing in our lives as God’s grace goes before us. Unit 2 focused on the nature of God as we examined the Wesleyan roots of scripture, salvation, justification, sanctification, Christian perfection, diversity, and the open table of Holy Communion providing access to the real presence of Christ. Unit 3 has described what it means to follow the way of Christ through the Wesleyan roots of social holiness, spiritual practices, learning together and individually, and living into the hope of the reign of God.

Where Will You Go from Here?

Thank you for accompanying me through my interpretation of some of the most important Wesleyan roots. There are many other aspects to the United Methodist understanding of faith, and if these have captured your imagination, it is my hope that you will continue your study of Wesleyan Christianity. Check the Resource Guide for a sample of that which is available to you.

The most important part of this entire journey is the concept of grace: how God loved you from before your birth, how God loves you now, and how God will continue to love you throughout eternity. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are offered a life that is better than it would ever have been otherwise. We only need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to participate in the way of salvation.

On behalf of the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, Bishop Mike McKee, and the Center for Leadership Development, I extend to you the love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Marsha Engle Middleton

⁴ Recinos, Harold J. “In a Divided World, Methodism Matters” found in Abraham, William J. and James E. Kirby, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2009.

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Think of a time in your life when you were in need of hope. How did God show up in your situation?
 - Where in the Wesleyan roots do you find the most hope? What is one way you can share this hope with others?
 - Have you thought through your own story of faith? Take an opportunity to think about and plan a thirty-second "elevator speech" in which you describe it to another. Do you believe God will provide you an opportunity to use it in real life? Do you think you have the courage to put it to use?
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