

NEROUS, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CONNECTED, SPIRIT-FILLED, MISSIONAL, RESILIENT, DISCIPLE-MAKING, PRAYING, GRACE-FILLED, GENEROUS, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CONNECTED, SPIRIT-FILLED, MISSIONAL, RESILIENT, DISCIPLE-MAKING, PRAYING, GRACE-FILLED, GENEROUS, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED

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A Discussion Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Thank you for downloading this discussion guide. In these pages, you will find a series of guides intended to help individuals and groups think through what it means to be United Methodist—to #BeUMC.

This discussion guide is divided into four main sections, each one focusing on one key theme of the #BeUMC campaign. Within every section you'll find guides about individual core values that relate to the key theme. Participants are encouraged to learn more about the key themes and core values, as well as the overall campaign, at UMC.org/BeUMC. Leaders should also visit ResourceUMC.org/BeUMC to find further information and resources.

The guides

In each session, you will find readings from Scripture and our United Methodist tradition. You can read the content here, but to go a little deeper, you may want to review the passages in context. Links are included to assist you in finding the complete readings where appropriate.

A series of questions is also included to encourage participants to reflect on the readings. The hope is these reflections will help you dig deeper into familiar passages and discover ideas that you may have never encountered before.

Whether you are participating alone or in a group, you will have opportunities to think about being United Methodist as an individual, a congregation and a global denomination.

Leading a group

This discussion guide is designed for flexibility. You may opt to host a session for each of the core values, or for a much shorter experience, you may choose to cover an entire section in each of four gatherings.

Alternately, a leader has the option to choose any of the individual core values that most closely relate to their local context, covering one or more in each gathering. Leaders are encouraged to strive for balance among the four sections.

Foundation: The United Methodist Church is founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace, anchored in Scripture, and based in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit.

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FOUNDATION: LIVING THE GOSPEL

The United Methodist Church is founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace, anchored in Scripture, and based in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit.

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FOUNDATION: LIVING THE GOSPEL

Acts 2:42-47

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

The General Rules of the Methodist Church, John Wesley (Book of Discipline)

Such a society is no other than "a company of [people] having the *form* and seeking the *power* of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."...

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts.

[Read 'The General Rules of the Methodist Church' in their entirety](#)

Foundation: Living the Gospel

The United Methodist Church is founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace, anchored in Scripture, and based in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit.

Discussion starters

There was a moment when every member of The United Methodist Church chose to be UMC. We found peace, healing, wholeness, community and more in a local congregation. We heard the teachings of Jesus, the leading of the Holy Spirit, the warm embrace of grace and learned the importance of the Bible.

As we begin discussing what it means to be a United Methodist, we remind ourselves of the basics of our faith, where it began for the church and for us.

Read Acts 2:42-47

- This passage begins with the story of Pentecost, a day when the Holy Spirit came to the followers of Jesus in a special way and thousands began a relationship with Jesus. When you think of your first encounter with Jesus, what images come to mind? Share your story.
- Immediately following the Pentecost event, these first Christians formed a community of faith. Why do you think it was important for them to come together in this way?
- In what ways does your congregation continue the ministry described in these verses? What have those ministries done for you and your faith journey?
- The passage concludes by telling us, “The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.” Why were people drawn to this early Christian community?

Read the excerpt of The General Rules

John Wesley originally wrote these rules for the early [Methodist Societies](#), groups where Christians supported, encouraged and facilitated one another’s spiritual growth.

- We often think of prayer as a solitary act. Yet both the passage from Acts 2 and John Wesley’s description of the early societies mention praying *together*. Why is it important to pray as a community? When have you experienced the importance of a community praying together?
- What do you think Wesley means when he writes that members “watch over one another in love”? Who are people who have done that for you? Whom do you watch over in love?
- Wesley shares how the rules—Do no harm, do good, attend upon all the ordinances of God—are rooted in “his written Word... And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts.” How is your life guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit?

Read the Foundation statement

- What is your initial response to the Foundation?
- How are the elements of grace, Scripture, the life and teachings of Jesus, and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit part of your daily life of faith?
- As you continue this study, how do you hope to grow as a follower of Jesus?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, you taught us how important it is to build our faith on a solid foundation. We confess there are times when we have allowed our focus to drift from the core tenets of what it means to be people of faith. Thank you for reminding us of what grounds us and allows us to grow as you have taught. Amen.

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Section 1

Key Theme:

DISCIPLE MAKING

First and foremost, we are dedicated to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in the tradition of John Wesley.

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DISCIPLE-MAKING

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

The Mission Statement of The United Methodist Church

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs. (Book of Discipline ¶120)

Discussion starters

Following his resurrection, Jesus prepares the disciples for his ascension. Matthew closes his gospel with Jesus’s final words to his disciples, which we sometimes refer to as the Great Commission.

The mission statement of The United Methodist Church echoes the Great Commission. Our role as United Methodists is to continue the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

- According to Matthew, this is the first time the disciples are seeing Jesus after the resurrection. How do you think they feel when they see him? How would you feel?
- Matthew tells us “they worshipped him, but some doubted.” Why would some doubt? What do you think is the source of their doubt?
- In their faith and doubt, Jesus directs them to continue his work in his physical absence. They are to make disciples of all nations, baptize and teach. Do you think this is still our call today?
- How has The Great Commission been misunderstood and misused through the years? How *should* we understand it?
- Jesus begins by saying, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth.” What does Jesus’ authority have to do with the commandment to make disciples of all nations?
- Jesus concludes by telling the disciples that he will be with them. Why do you think he includes that here? How might the disciples (and we) find it comforting that Jesus is with us every step of the way?

Read the Mission Statement of The United Methodist Church

- Share your first impressions of this statement and its connection to The Great Commission.
- Who are some of the people who have shaped your faith?
- What do you think The United Methodist Church means by “the transformation of the world”? Why is that important?
- Our mission statement concludes by affirming the role of the local church as one of “the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.” Why do you think that is? How is your congregation making disciples of Jesus Christ?

How are you a disciple-making person of God?

- How will you encourage discipleship in those around you this week?

Closing prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the Great Commission. Thank you for those who have gone before us making disciples, baptizing, and teaching about you. We especially remember those who have nurtured us in the faith. Thank you for our church that calls us to continue to live into the work to which you called your disciples. Send us forth to be disciples and to make disciples. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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FAITHFUL

Hebrews 12:1-2

So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.

Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" ([United Methodist Hymnal 384](#))

*Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless* let us be,
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restor'd in thee;
Chang'd from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!*

*Charles Wesley's original reads *sinless*.

Discussion starters

United Methodists view faith as a life-long journey. The Bible teaches that God does not leave us, but continues to shape us throughout our lives. We grow in faith and discipleship every day.

In the book of Hebrews, the author offers a beautiful image of that journey as a foot race. He/She is drawing from a then-contemporary (but ancient to us) sports analogy. Racers follow a course with a crowd cheering them on toward the finish line.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

- The author of Hebrews invites us to run "with endurance," implying the life of faith is a marathon and not a sprint. If you are in a group, have one of the participants who has been a Christian the longest share how their faith as shaped them and brought them to where they are today.
- How have you grown as a follower of Jesus?
- Who are some of the members of your "great cloud of witnesses"? In what ways are you part of another person's cheering section in the faith?

- Do you think everyone follows the same course? In what ways are our “courses” the same? In what ways might they differ?
- The author encourages us to drop any extra baggage and focus on Jesus. What do you think the author means by “baggage” and “the sin that trips us up”? How can we better focus on Jesus?
- The author refers to Jesus as “faith’s pioneer and perfecter.” What do you think that means?

John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement in 1700s England, wrote about our journey of faith after our justification—what some today would call our moment of salvation. Their word for this process was *sanctification*, or sometimes *perfection*. They taught that spiritual growth was not something that we achieved, but that it was a gift of the sanctifying grace of God.

Today, we can get hung up on words like “perfection” and “holy,” but the Wesleys’ major point was that the life of faith is a growing process. God is not done with us at the moment of justification. Instead, we continue to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ throughout our lives.

Read (or sing) “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”

- Where in this song do you hear about the process of growing in our faith?
- Charles Wesley writes, “Chang’d from glory into glory, / Till in heaven we take our place.” How are Christians changed from glory to glory?
- Share (or write) about your spiritual journey. How have you grown as a follower of Jesus?
 - Who has inspired you? Encouraged you? Challenged you?
 - How has your faith been strengthened?
 - What struggles have you encountered?
 - How are you living out your faith differently today than you did when you first came to Christ?
- Knowing that we are all on a path of growth, what does that say about the diversity of thought and beliefs we may have with others in our small group, congregation, and denomination?

How are you a faithful person of God?

- What spiritual practices have been most foundational and formational in your life?
- What new faith practices might you explore in order to continue growing?

Closing prayer

Spirit of the living God, thank you for all of the ways you have blessed us with spiritual growth. Thank you for the cloud of witnesses who have loved, taught, inspired, pastored, encouraged and challenged us. Strengthen us, O God, that we might be a source of loving encouragement to others along life’s spiritual path. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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DEEPLY ROOTED

1 Corinthians 11:1

Follow my example, just like I follow Christ's. –CEB

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. –NRSV

John Wesley, "Advice to a People Called Methodist"

By Methodists I mean, a people who profess to pursue (in whatsoever measure they have attained) holiness of heart and life... in a steady imitation of Him they worship... in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart, and governing the life.

Discussion starters

United Methodists trace our spiritual heritage back to a movement that began in 18th century England. John and Charles Wesley started a college group at Oxford University to help them continue in their spiritual growth while they were away at school. Their "Holy Club," as they became known, worshiped and served together. They learned and read together. They encouraged one another to remain faithful.

Other students noticed their "methods" and began calling the group "Methodists." They did not mean it as a compliment.

Through the years, the movement spread as people who wanted to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus joined Methodist societies where they mentored one another in their faith journeys. [Learn more about that history.](#)

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

- After sharing advice on how Christians should approach food sacrificed to idols, a controversial issue in his day, the Apostle Paul writes, "Follow my example, just like I follow Christ's." What do you think he means by that?
- How do we continue to follow the example of Paul today?
- Our Christian roots go back to the Bible. Why is it important that we know the Bible story?
- Our roots also include 2000 years of people who have followed Jesus. Why is it important to know the history of our faith?
- Who has modeled Jesus for you? Who initially showed you what it looks like to live as a Christian?

Read the words of John Wesley printed above

- What is your initial response?
- Wesley writes that Methodists pursue “a steady imitation of Him they worship,” which may be an allusion to 1 Corinthians 11:1. Thomas à Kempis, a 15th century theologian, wrote *The Imitation of Christ*, a devotional still used by Christians today. Where do you need to grow in your imitation of Christ?
- Wesley organized the Methodist societies into small groups called *classes*, where people were to “watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation” ([The General Rules](#)). Who are the people in your life who encourage you in your spiritual journey?
- Wesley names some attributes worthy of imitation: justice, mercy, truth, and love filling your heart and governing your life. What do each of these look like today? How might they be lived out in your life?
 - Which of these areas is strongest in your life? In the ministries of your congregation?
 - In which of these areas do you feel challenged to grow? How about your church?
- For reflection: Who is looking to you—following your example as you follow Christ’s?

How are you a deeply rooted person of God?

- What would you most like to learn about your faith roots?

Closing prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the people in our lives who are showing us your way. For parents, grandparents, pastors, teachers, friends, neighbors and so many others who are worthy of imitation. O God, by your Spirit strengthen us in justice, mercy, truth and love, so that we may be beacons of your light to the world around us. Amen.

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CHRIST-CENTERED

Colossians 3:15-17

The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

“Nothing Between” by Charles Albert Tindley (UM Hymnal 373)

Nothing between my soul and my Savior,
so that his blessed face may be seen;
Nothing preventing the least of his favor;
keep the way clear! let nothing between.

Discussion starters

Being a follower of Jesus is about not only what we believe, but also how we live. As Christ-centered people of God, we are to grow closer to Jesus every day. We are called to live, love and be in the world as those who represent our Savior to everyone we meet throughout the day.

Read Colossians 3:12-17

- This passage tells us we should do everything in the name of Jesus. What does that look like for you?
- In what parts of your life do you find it challenging to remain Christ-centered?
- Are there people in your life who challenge your compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (verse 12)?
- Reflect on and share a time(s) when you have felt you were doing exactly what God created you to do. How did that feel? What brought you into that space? What keeps you from being in that mindset every day?
- Part of this passage talks about worship, singing, gratitude, and Bible study. How do you use these practices, and others, to remain centered in Christ?
- John Wesley taught that growing in our faith is not something we achieve. How does knowing that your growth is a gift by the sanctifying (or perfecting) grace of God shape your thinking about being a Christ-centered person of God?

Read or sing “Nothing Between”

“Nothing Between” was written by the Rev. Charles Tindley, a Methodist pastor and hymn writer who served in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Tindley Temple United Methodist Church is named for its founding pastor. [Learn more](#) about Charles Tindley.

- As you reflect on the lyrics of this song, what words jump off the page for you? Why?
- Tindley offers example after example of things that might get between a believer and Jesus—worldly pleasure, habits, pride, friends, difficulty, etc. Which are the most difficult for you?
- He also shares strategies to “keep the way clear! let nothing between.” Which of those stands out for you? What’s one you will use as encouragement in the week ahead?
- Colossians is a letter written to a community of faith and “Nothing Between” is for congregational singing. Why is it important to come together as we seek to become more Christ-centered? How can this group support you on your journey?

How are you a Christ-centered person of God?

- How are you striving to focus on Jesus with every breath, every thought and every action?

Closing prayer

It is only by your grace, O God, that we continue to grow as followers of Jesus Christ. Strengthen us daily as by prayer, worship, and Bible study we seek your face. Equip us to keep at bay all that threatens to get between my soul and my Savior. Amen.

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GROUNDED IN SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:8-9

From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

Scripture, The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016

United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture, the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace. We are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst whom we trust in life and death. The biblical authors, illumined by the Holy Spirit, bear witness that in Christ the world is reconciled to God. The Bible bears authentic testimony to God's self-disclosure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as in God's work of creation, in the pilgrimage of Israel, and in the Holy Spirit's ongoing activity in human history.

As we open our minds and hearts to the Word of God through the words of human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit, faith is born and nourished, our understanding is deepened, and the possibilities for transforming the world become apparent to us.

Read the [full text here](#).

John Wesley

I want to know one thing — the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* [a person of one book]. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of [others]. I sit down alone: Only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.

John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions, Preface*

Discussion starters

The Bible is our primary source for understanding and growing in faith. Through reading and study of the Scriptures on our own, in worship, or with a class or small group, we hear God speak to us and guide us in our daily living.

Read Philippians 4:1-9

- This Bible calls us to focus our thoughts on that which is excellent, admirable, true, holy, just, pure, lovely and worthy of praise. How does a daily practice of reading the Bible help us keep that focus? What are some things that distract us?

- Are there things that are not necessarily bad that can bring us into a place where we struggle to see the excellent and admirable?

Read the Book of Discipline passage posted above

This reading is from a section of The United Methodist Book of Discipline called “Our Theological Guidelines.” The first two paragraphs are printed above. The full text appears on UMC.org.

- As you read the text, what stands out for you? Why?
- The first sentence reads in part, “Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine.” What does that mean?
- How does Christ “meet us in Scripture”? What does that say about the Bible? What does that say about how we read the Bible?
- United Methodists are encouraged to “open our minds and hearts” as we read Scripture. Why is that an important posture to bring to our Bible reading?

Read the excerpt from John Wesley’s preface to a compilation of his published sermons

- What do you think of John Wesley’s description of the Bible?
- Wesley, who was well read, describes himself as *homo unius libri*, a person of one book. What does he mean by that description of himself?
- Wesley describes his practice of finding a quiet place to read the Bible. “Only God is here,” he writes. “In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.” Why is it important for us to read the Bible alone?
- How is Wesley’s understanding of Scripture reflected in the passage from the Book of Discipline in the previous reading?

How are you a grounded-in-Scripture person of God?

- In what ways is the Bible central to your life and faith?
- How could you grow in your practice of reading, understanding and meeting Christ in the Bible?

Closing prayer

Thank you God for meeting us where we are every day. We are so grateful for the Bible, and the opportunities we have to meet Christ there and learn the way to heaven. May we continue to draw closer to you as we come into your presence through the words of Scripture each day. Amen.

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Section 2

Key Theme:

BELONGING & INCLUSION

**All belong and will be loved in The United Methodist Church.
All will be heard, respected and engaged. All will be free to
develop their personal relationship with God and to serve
fully in the ministry of Jesus Christ.**

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DIVERSE

Luke 9:49-50

John replied, “Master, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he isn’t in our group of followers.”

But Jesus replied, “Don’t stop him, because whoever isn’t against you is for you.”

John Wesley, Catholic Spirit: Sermon 39

Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. (¶4)

Hold you fast that which you believe is most acceptable to God, and I will do the same. I believe the Episcopal form of church government to be scriptural and apostolical. If you think the Presbyterian or Independent is better, think so still, and act accordingly. I believe infants ought to be baptized; and that this may be done either by dipping or sprinkling. If you are otherwise persuaded, be so still, and follow your own persuasion. ... I have no desire to dispute with you one moment upon any of the preceding heads. Let all these smaller points stand aside. Let them never come into sight. “If thine heart is as my heart,” if thou lovest God and all [hu]mankind, I ask no more: “give me thine hand.” (§II, ¶12)

Discussion starters

We are social creatures, designed to live in community. We celebrate family bonds, community ties, and even feel a kinship with fellow fans of our favorite football team.

Sometimes, however, our ideas about belonging are corrupted and we begin to draw defined circles too closely. When we view the “other” as one of “them,” we have entered into dangerous territory. Jesus is quick to correct his disciples when they begin to talk about “us.”

Jesus modeled the ways we should be more accepting of the beautiful diversity intrinsic in the people of God.

Read Luke 9:46-50

- Why do you think the disciples tried to stop someone they did not know from “throwing demons out” in Jesus’ name?
- What do the disciples mean when they say, “he isn’t in our group of followers”? What might they have thought of as a qualification to be in “our group of followers”? How have they drawn their circle too tightly?

- Jesus widens the circle. He tells the disciples not to stop this other person, “because whoever isn’t against you is for you.” Why does Jesus appear disinterested in defining his group? Why isn’t he concerned about this other person? What might this say about whom Jesus sees as his followers?
- In the first part of this passage (verses 46-48), the disciples are arguing about “which of them was the greatest.” How are these stories related? What similar elements do you see?

Read the excerpt from John Wesley’s sermon, “Catholic Spirit”

[Read the sermon in its entirety.](#)

- From the beginning of his sermon, John Wesley acknowledges that we are not all going to agree on everything. Is it okay simply to disagree? Why or why not?
- Later in the sermon, Wesley calls differences in church government, baptism, forms of prayer, and more as “smaller points.” Do you agree that these are “smaller points”? What might Wesley include in that list today?
- What would be larger points, things Wesley might “desire to dispute”?
 - *Note: Wesley writes, “If thou lovest God and all [hu]mankind, I ask no more.”*
- Wesley writes, “If [your] heart is as mine... give me [your] hand.” What does he mean by “give me your hand”?
- As a church, we sometimes struggle with a diversity of opinions. What are the advantages of us all not thinking alike? What are the challenges?
- Who are the people in your life with whom you strongly disagree, but love anyway? What binds you to that person? Why can you overcome the differences in him/her?
- When is it okay to agree to disagree?
- How does being a diverse people of God strengthen our witness as disciples of Jesus Christ?

How do you experience The UMC as a diverse people of God?

- How could we improve?
- How will you fill your life with more diversity?

Closing prayer

Creator God, we are so grateful for the diverse ways you have made us. We are grateful for those with whom we agree and disagree. Give us eyes to see beyond our differences, to focus on the love you have for each person. Fill us with your grace and peace that we might share the acceptance we feel from you with everyone we meet. Amen.

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JUSTICE-SEEKING

Amos 5:24

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Book of Discipline, ¶102. Section 1—Our Doctrinal Heritage

Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world.

Matthew 22:37-39

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Discussion starters

Often, our ideas about justice are connected to our politics. Our faith, however, calls us to seek justice for all people. Prophets like Amos talked about it. Jesus worked for it. Our United Methodist Church advocates for it around the world.

Read Amos 5:21-24

- God speaks through the prophet Amos to tell people to put away their worship, songs and sacrifices because God actually wants justice and righteousness. Why might God not be pleased with our piety? What do justice and righteousness have to do with our faith?
- When you think of the word *justice*, what comes to mind? How is the biblical understanding of justice the same or different from the ways we understand justice today?
- In this passage, *justice* and *righteousness* are linked. How are they similar? How are they different? How does the biblical understanding of righteousness differ from ways we use that word today?

Read ¶102. Section 1—Our Doctrinal Heritage from The United Methodist Book of Discipline

- What is the connection between our personal piety and a passion for justice?
- Why is it important that the church be involved in working for justice around the globe? In our community? In our families?
- What injustices bother you most? How are you seeking and advocating for justice?
- We often view justice as the work of politicians and policies, but there are injustices that occur at work and school, among our friends, etc. How can you work for justice in the lives of the people around you?

Read Matthew 22:34-40

- When someone asks Jesus what the greatest commandment is, he gives two. How are our love of God and love of neighbor related?
- Those of us familiar with this passage don't often think of it as a lesson in justice. How might loving our neighbor include acting and advocating for justice?
- In his "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King Jr. famously quotes Amos 5:24: "we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." How do we continue to seek justice today?

How are you a justice-seeking person of God?

- How could you and your church grow in this area?

Closing prayer (Prayer of St. Francis, UM Hymnal 481)

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love;

for it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

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RESILIENT

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out.

“And Are We Yet Alive?” by Charles Wesley (verses 1-4, UM Hymnal 553)

And are we yet alive, and see each other's face?
Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace!

Preserved by power divine to full salvation here,
again in Jesus' praise we join, and in his sight appear.

What troubles have we seen, what mighty conflicts past,
fightings without, and fears within, since we assembled last!

Yet out of all the Lord hath brought us by his love;
and still he doth his help afford, and hides our life above.

Discussion starters

It is easy to feel disheartened in our world. A global pandemic, racial injustice, climate change, economic worries, political divisiveness, family issues, and so much more threaten to steal our joy every day. Yet as people of God, we are people of hope, a hope that gives us strength to rebound even from the most difficult of circumstances. Our faith makes us resilient.

Read or sing, “And Are We Yet Alive”

Written by Charles Wesley in 1749, Methodists have used this hymn during annual meetings ever since. From John Wesley's annual society meetings to our annual conferences today, these words remind us that though life can be difficult, God is with us through it all.

- When was the last time you sang this hymn?
- Why do you think the Methodists have sung and continue to sing these words?
- As you reflect on the words of this hymn, what feelings well up in you? What gatherings does this remind you of? What people do you picture as you sing this song?
- What makes Christians so resilient?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

- The Apostle Paul, the author of 2 Corinthians, was no stranger to hardship. Yet he writes, “We are knocked down, but we aren’t knocked out.” What hardships have you faced? How has your faith brought you through?
- Paul never makes light of his hardships. He feels them. Later in this letter (11:24-27), he lists some of them: imprisoned, whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and a list of other dangers he faced. What has given him strength in the midst of the hardship?
- As you reflect on your own hardships, how has your faith made you resilient?
- The primary reason Christians are a resilient people is because we believe in resurrection. Death does not have the final word. Where have you seen resurrection in your life and in the lives of others?
- How does the promise of resurrection give you hope?
- How does your faith help to keep you from discouragement?
- As you reflect on the conflicts and troubles in your life and in the church, what gives you hope? How will you continue to remain faithful, even in the midst of difficult times?

How are you a resilient person of God?

- How have you experienced or witnessed resilience in The United Methodist Church’s global connection?

Closing prayer

Jesus, in whose resurrection we find our hope, strengthen us in the midst of life’s difficulties. Teach us to focus not on the “fightings without and fears within,” but instead to lean on your grace in the midst of our trials. Heal our brokenness and make us resilient people of God. Amen.

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WELCOMING

Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep loving each other like family. Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.

The Prayer of St. Francis (UM Hymnal 481)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Discussion starters

Being a welcoming person of God entails more than inviting people into spaces where we feel most comfortable. Christ also compels us out into the world, to meet people wherever they are, and to serve as a welcoming presence to others.

Read Hebrews 13:1-8

- What images stand out for you in the passage?
- Have you ever hosted an angel without knowing it? What does that mean to you?
- When we view others as angels in disguise, how might we treat them differently?

- Many people in our communities have been separated from others—prisoners, those suffering from illness, caregivers, and others. How can you be a welcoming presence to them?
- Early Christians, sometimes subjected to the threat of persecution, must have been tempted to withdraw from society. This passage appears to be directly confronting that instinct. Today, we may be tempted to do the same. How does this passage speak to our instincts to isolate from those who may threaten to harm us? How might this influence our social media habits?
- How does this passage challenge us to expand our definition of hospitality?
- This passage concludes with a statement of faith, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!” What do those words mean to you?

Read the Prayer of St. Francis

- What do you know about St. Francis of Assisi? (*For more information, see “[What St. Francis can teach United Methodists](#)” by Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service.*)
- In the opening section, we pray to be a peaceful presence in the midst of negative forces. How might that make others feel welcome in our presence?
- In the second section of the prayer, we ask God to help us put aside our own desires so that we might attend to the needs of the other—to console, understand and love. Which of those comes naturally to you? Which is the most difficult?

How are you a welcoming person of God?

- How might God be asking you to stretch out of your comfort zone to be a welcoming presence to those who feel alone and separated from church, society, others?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, we know of your radical hospitality. You were sometimes criticized for spending time with people who others would not welcome. Even as you were dying, you were ready to welcome into paradise one on a cross next to you. Strengthen us, O God, as we confront our temptations to separate. Teach us the joy of welcoming others, that we might discover the joy of hosting angels without knowing it. Amen.

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Section 3

Key Theme:

INFLUENCE, CONNECTION & IMPACT

With more than 12 million members across the globe, we are a powerful connection, living and sharing the grace of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are committed to work for global health, education, creation care, child welfare, disaster recovery and countless other efforts.

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MISSIONAL

James 2:18

Someone might claim, “You have faith and I have action.” But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I’ll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action.

Acts 1:7

Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

United Methodist Global Ministries

Since the inception of its predecessor organizations, Global Ministries has implemented its programs throughout The UMC connection, focusing on expanding the presence of the denomination and facilitating its participation in God’s mission in all geographic and political contexts in which the church is called to serve. Global Ministries has maintained its identity as an agency that is present and serving around the world, moving from a distinction between “home” and “foreign” missions to “national” and “world” divisions, to a global understanding of mission as the presence and action of God in the world who invites us to participate in all areas of service, and to a practice of mission “from everywhere to everywhere.” (adapted from <https://umcmmission.org/history/>)

Discussion starters

Since the early days of the Oxford “Holy Club,” Methodists have found missions as an expression of our faith. We reach out to neighbors near and far, offering the love of Jesus in word and deed. We do this in many ways. As a denomination, we support missionaries and dynamic, community-centric initiatives all over the world. Local churches operate food banks, clothing and shelter ministries, childcare services, support groups and countless other caring ministries that introduce all people to the love of Jesus.

We don’t do this to win God’s favor, but because we are recipients of God’s love and grace. In other words, we show our love for God by loving whom God loves... everyone!

Read James 2:14-26

- What is the relationship between faith and action?
- James teaches that faith without action is dead. What does he mean by that?

- What about action without faith?
- Why is it important for Christians to be missional people?
- How did Jesus model missions for us?
- How is our missions work—both near and far—an expression of our faith?

Read Acts 1:1-11

- Before Jesus ascends, his final words to his disciples are, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” How did the disciples live out that call? How does The United Methodist Church continue to follow that calling today?
- Jesus tells his followers the Holy Spirit will give them power to accomplish this work. What is the Spirit’s role in our mission work? Why is it important to maintain a relationship with the Spirit of God as you serve your community?

Read the statement above about the work of Global Ministries

- Why is it important to be part of a church that participates in God’s mission across the globe?
- The statement talks about the “practice of mission ‘from everywhere to everywhere.’” Why does that matter? How is this different from how missions might have been thought of in the past?
- Today, Global Ministries understands their work as being “the presence and action of God in the world.” How is that different from past references to home/foreign and national/world? Why does this distinction matter?
- Sometimes we compartmentalize missions as something an agency of the church does, the trip our youth group takes each summer, or something we do once a month at the local food bank. However, we can view every day as a mission trip, as an opportunity to show God’s love to one whom God loves. How will you be a missionary this week?

How are you a missional person of God?

- How does your congregation serve in mission?
- How do you participate in the mission work of The United Methodist Church?

Closing prayer

God of all people, guide and empower us by your Holy Spirit to live out Jesus’ call to be witnesses in our neighborhoods, our regions, and all around the world. May we be people who live out our faith, who demonstrate our love by loving those you love. Give us eyes to see the need and the will and ability to meet it. Amen.

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CONNECTED

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Also, one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn't easily snap.

Romans 12:5

In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.

Baptismal Covenant I (UM Hymnal, 35)

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?

With God's help we will proclaim the good news
and live according to the example of Christ.

We will surround these persons
with a community of love and forgiveness,
that they may grow in their trust of God,
and be found faithful in their service to others.

We will pray for them,
that they may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.

Discussion starters

Being part of a church—a community of faith—is important for our spiritual journeys. Today, we can attend classes online, buy a car from our couch, and worship via YouTube. That may lead us to believe we can do anything alone. Our faith journeys, however, are best nurtured when we are connected to a community of faith—which may include digital relationships and online worship!

Read Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

- Why do people choose to be alone?
 - *Note: Some people find themselves alone even though they would prefer not to be. How can we minister to those who are alone?*

- Ecclesiastes shares several benefits of friendship/community. Which is your favorite? Why?
- The author of Ecclesiastes writes, “A three-ply cord doesn’t easily snap.” What does that mean? How has the presence of others helped you during difficult times?
- How can others be most helpful when life is difficult? How might they sometimes complicate things?

Read the quote above from Baptismal Covenant I

When someone is brought into the community of faith through baptism, confirmation, or church membership, we ask the congregation if we will nurture them.

- What does the congregation promise the new person?
- What parts do you and/or your church do well? For which parts do you see a need for improvement?
- As a congregation, what do we say about the importance of community?
- How has your church, and churches of which you have been a part in the past, been a nurturing place to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ? How are you nurturing the faith of others?

Read Romans 12:3-8

This biblical image of the Church as the Body of Christ is familiar to many. If you are one of those people, try to read it with new eyes.

- What does it mean to be “part” of the body? What part are you? What are the benefits of knowing you are joined with others in this body?
- Do you find comfort in knowing you don’t have to do it all? That together we can accomplish things not one of us could do on our own?
- In verse 5, we read that, “individually we belong to each other.” What is meant by that? How do you belong to your church? How do you belong to The United Methodist Church? How are you connected to Christians across the globe? Throughout time?

How are you a connected person of God?

- How will you nurture your connections to others? To your church? To God?

Closing prayer

Creator God, thank you for knitting together my community of faith. Thank you for my part in the Church, and for others who nurture and strengthen me in my life’s journey. Teach me how to receive the love and forgiveness of my church, and to be a person offering love and forgiveness to others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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WORLD-CHANGING

Luke 13:20-21

Again he said, “To what can I compare God’s kingdom? It’s like yeast, which a woman took and hid in a bushel of wheat flour until the yeast had worked its way through the whole.”

Journal of John Wesley

I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to; and sure I am that His blessing attends it. Great encouragement have I, therefore, to be faithful in fulfilling the work He hath given me to do. His servant I am, and, as such, am employed according to the plain direction of His Word, ‘As I have opportunity, doing good unto all men’; and His providence clearly concurs with his Word; which has disengaged me from all things else, that I might singly attend on this very thing, ‘and go about doing good.’

Discussion starters

One of the markers of the early Methodist societies was their outreach to their communities and to the world. The first Methodist society meetinghouse in Bristol, England—known as the New Room—did not have pews fixed to the floor. Instead, the seats were removable, so that the room could be used for educating children or offering food and home remedies to the community.

John Wesley modeled much of this for the early Methodists. In addition to publishing sermons and religious treatises, he also assembled a book of home remedies called *Primitive Physick* (his best seller during his lifetime).

Read Luke 13:18-21

It is remarkable how much Jesus is able to teach in these brief parables/analogies.

- In the verses 18-19, Jesus compares God’s kingdom to a mustard seed that grows into a tree. Who might the “birds in the sky” be referencing?
- Note that the mustard tree provides a home for the birds. How does Jesus call us to provide a home for those around us? In addition to a physical home, how can we provide a sense of home to others?
- In the second part of this passage, Jesus uses the metaphor of yeast to teach about God’s kingdom. What is the significance of yeast?

- What do you make of the idea that the yeast works “its way through the whole”?
- What might it mean for your community to have members of your church work their way into the whole? What differences might it make for your community? What difference might it make in your spiritual life?
- What needs are present in your community? How are you and your church fulfilling those needs?

Read the excerpt from Wesley’s journal above

Wesley was a priest of the Church of England, where clergy were assigned a parish. Serving as a fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford, Wesley worked outside of that system.

- What did Wesley mean by “I look upon all the world as my parish”?
- Wesley writes about his work as two-fold: (1) to declare to and (2) do good for all people. How does this echo what Jesus calls us to do? How is Wesley participating in God’s kingdom?
- How might we understand what Wesley’s message means today?
- In what ways do you view the world as your parish, the place where you tell others about Jesus and serve them?
- How are you yeast to the people around you?

How will you be a world-changing person of God?

- Where is God calling you to bring change? Work? Family? Neighborhood?

Closing prayer

Since we have met you, Lord Jesus, our lives have completely changed. Grant us the wisdom to introduce that life-change to others, both through what we say and how we serve. May we be yeast to our community, and part of a global denomination that is changing the world. By your grace, we pray. Amen.

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GENEROUS

2 Corinthians 9:7-9

Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written, *He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever* [Psalm 112:9].

Why We Give

We give to minister in Jesus' name. Together, United Methodists do remarkable ministry around the world. We care for survivors recovering from earthquakes and storms; we invest, long term, in vulnerable communities; we implement the most effective solutions to diseases like malaria; we equip the next generation to lead the Church and society. In all of this, we share the good news of Jesus Christ.

We give because God first gave to us. (UMC.org)

Discussion starters

Generosity is a spiritual discipline. Not only does it help the people for whom we give, but it also improves our relationships with our resources of money, time, attention, skills, and more! When we gift what we've been gifted, we give glory to the giver!

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7-9

In 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, the Apostle Paul talks to the church in Corinth about a collection he is taking up for the poor.

- Many of us know the line, "God loves a cheerful giver." As you read that in the context of the sentences around it, what is Bible telling us about giving?
- Why does God call us to share what we have with others?
- When you think about God's generosity, what comes to mind? How has God been generous to you? To all of us?
- How is generosity a spiritual discipline? How does the practice of generosity help us to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ?
- Share a time when someone has been generous to you.

- When you have been your most generous, what have you learned about yourself? Your faith?
- Besides our money, with what other resources can we be generous?

Read the 'Why We Give' excerpt from [UMC.org](https://www.UMC.org) above

Through our every Sunday giving and special offerings, we participate in the ministries of generosity of The United Methodist Church.

- What does it mean to you to be part of a generous denomination?
- Did you know about all the ways The United Methodist Church is being generous around the world? Learn more at [UMC.org](https://www.UMC.org) and [UMCOR.org](https://www.UMCOR.org).
- What are some of the ways your congregation is generous in your community?

How are you a generous person of God?

- What steps can you take to boost your generosity?

Closing prayer

Generous, loving God, You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.* Thank you for the many blessings you have shared with us. Teach and encourage us to be generous with others in the ways that you have been generous with us. In your Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

*Psalm 145:16

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Section 4

Key Theme:

EXPERIENCE OF GOD THROUGH THE UMC

**We embrace a Church where we experience our triune God
in personal and community relationships, transforming our
own lives, the lives around us,
and the entire world.**

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COMMITTED

Acts 2:42

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers.

We Are the Church (UM Hymnal, 558)

I am the church! You are the church!

We are the church together.

All who follow Jesus, all around the world!

Yes, we're the church together!

Discussion starters

We live into our commitment to God by being committed to one another. The very first Christians, whose stories the book of Acts shares with us, serve as an example to us still today. In this handful of verses we read about their commitments to learning together, meeting together, eating together, and praying together. They took care of one another, opened their homes, and “demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.”

Sing/Read “We Are the Church”

- Verse 1 reminds us that the church is more than a building or place. We are the Church. When you think of your church, who comes to mind?
- Verse 2 has us singing about the diversity of the Church. Why is it important to recognize we are “many kinds of people”?
- Verse 5 refers to the Pentecost Sunday story in Acts 2. How is the story of Pentecost related to the Church? What is the Holy Spirit’s role in our commitment to our church?
- Back in verse 1, we sing, “The church is not a resting place.” How does your church help your faith stay alive and active? What activities and commitments encourage your continued growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?*

**from the [mission statement](#) of The United Methodist Church*

Read Acts 2:42-47

- What commitments do you have? To family? Work? Others?
- Why are commitments important?
- This passage is part of a description of the early days of what would become the Church. How has our understanding of commitment to the Church changed from those days? In what ways is it the same?
- Why is it important to note that in addition to learning, worshiping and praying together, these early Christians also ate together?
- The author of Acts tells us that this group “praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.” What might that have looked like?
- Why do you think this commitment to God and one another drew others to join them?
- How has your church showed their commitment to you? How do you show your commitment to your church?
- What does it mean to you to be a committed Christian?

How are you a committed person of God?

- How will you continue to honor your commitments to Christ and the Church?

Closing prayer

Holy Spirit, you descended upon the early followers of Jesus in a powerful way, guiding and strengthening them in their commitment to Christ and one another. Unite your Church again today in our love for God, our commitment to one another and striving to share God’s goodness with everyone. Teach us how we can be the Church, together. Amen.

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JESUS-SEEKING

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened.

The General Rule of Discipleship

“To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (The 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, ¶ 1117.2).

John 20:15

Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”

Discussion starters

Our seeking of Jesus does not end the first time we meet him. It is a life-long pursuit. Every day we seek to follow Jesus more closely than we did the day before. We do this through times of worship and devotion, as well as acts of compassion and justice.

Read Matthew 7:7-12

- Jesus says, “Whoever seeks, finds.” What do you think he means? How have you experienced this to be true?
- Following this statement, Jesus asks a series of rhetorical questions about how no parent would give a child bad things. He concludes, “how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.” What does this say about the ways God gives to us?
- Are there times when God might say, “No” to us? Why or why not?

Read the General Rule of Discipleship above or out of the Book of Discipline

- The General Rule of Discipleship is a way of seeking after Jesus. We do this through “acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion.” How do each of these draw us closer to Jesus?
- When do you feel closest to Jesus? Sunday morning worship? Reading your Bible alone? Serving a neighbor? At a rally advocating for justice?

Read John 20:11-18

- While Mary stands outside the tomb, Jesus asks, “Who are you looking for?” That is a good question for all of us to consider. How would you answer that question?
- Do you think your answer has changed as you’ve grown in your faith?
- Mary does not recognize Jesus. His appearance may have changed or it may simply be that she didn’t expect to find Jesus alive. Have there been times when you may have missed seeing Jesus because he didn’t appear in the way you expected? How has Jesus surprised you with his presence somewhere you did not expect it?

How are you a Jesus-seeking person of God?

- How will you seek Jesus this week?
- How will you encourage others as they yearn to grow closer to Jesus?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, who appeared to Mary in the garden, teach us to seek after you. Thank you for being with us in our daily living. Give us eyes that we might recognize you in places we might not readily expect. May our worship, prayers, service and action be means of seeking your face. Amen.

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SPIRIT-FILLED

Luke 4:16-19

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

John 20:21-23

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

Baptismal Covenant I (UM Hymnal, 37)

The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Discussion starters

Some of us may have preconceptions of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It might be good to share them with your group, or write them down in a journal. The Bible, however, offers examples of a variety of ways God's people can be filled with the Spirit.

Read Luke 4:14-20

- Jesus reads that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed and sent him. How does Jesus' list surprise you? What feels familiar?
- How is your congregation continuing the ministry outlined in this passage?
- Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. How is the Holy Spirit present in the Hebrew Scriptures?

Read John 20:19-23

- One of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances is to the disciples where they are hiding on Easter Sunday night. Twice in this handful of verses, Jesus says, "Peace be with you." Why does he feel the need to greet them in this way? Why might the disciples be feeling less than peaceful, even after they see Jesus?
- After Jesus tells the disciples he is sending them to continue his ministry, he "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" What is the connection between breath and Spirit?
- In Acts 1:8, Jesus reminds the disciples of the role of the Holy Spirit in their work: "Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." What is the connection between being sent by Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
- What is Jesus saying about the forgiveness of sins in the last section? *It might help to think of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."*

Scan Baptismal Covenant I, pages 33-39 in the UM Hymnal

- Look for references to the Holy Spirit. What are some of the ones you see?
- After baptism, the pastor lays hands on the person just baptized and blesses them with the words quoted above. Why do we pray for the Holy Spirit to work within us? What does that work look like and feel like?
- How do we make ourselves receptive to the Spirit? How do we become Spirit-filled?
- Who are some Spirit-filled people you know? What do you admire about them?

How will you live as a Spirit-filled person of God?

- How will you continue the ministries that Jesus and Isaiah outline?

Closing prayer

Fill me, O God, with your Holy Spirit, that I might be strengthened to participate in the ministries of sharing your good news with the world. May every day be one where I become more and more filled with your love and Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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PRAYING

1 Thessalonians 5:16-21

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Don't suppress the Spirit. Don't brush off Spirit-inspired messages, but examine everything carefully and hang on to what is good.

John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (question 38, paragraph 5)

God's command to "pray without ceasing" is founded on the necessity we have of his grace to preserve the life of God in the soul, which can no more subsist one moment without it, than the body can without air.

Whether we think of; or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing him.

All that a Christian does, even in eating and sleeping, is prayer, when it is done in simplicity, according to the order of God, without either adding to or diminishing from it by his own choice...

In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer...

God only requires of his adult children, that their hearts be truly purified, and that they offer him continually the wishes and vows that naturally spring from perfect love. For these desires, being the genuine fruits of love, are the most perfect prayers that can spring from it.

Discussion starters

Visitors to [John Wesley's home in London](#) can enter a small room off of his bedroom where he spent an hour in prayer each morning. Wesley's prayer practice strengthened him throughout his ministry. As those who seek God throughout each day, we are a praying people of God.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-21

- How do you understand verses 16-18, "Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation"?
- Does prayer come easily to you? Are there others whose prayer life you admire?
- Why is consistency in rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving important to our lives of faith?
- How is prayer central to all of the instructions in this passage?

Read John Wesley's thoughts on prayer printed above

John Wesley's 18th century English and sentence structure can make this difficult to understand the first time. It may help to read it slowly, aloud and multiple times.

- Wesley says that prayer is to the soul what breathing is to the body. What do you think he means? Do you agree?
- Wesley also expands our understanding of prayer beyond the act of praying. He writes, "all is prayer, when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing him." In what ways is your life a living prayer?
- Why does Wesley connect prayer and love? How is love for God and others an act of prayer?
- These readings don't lend themselves easily to our traditional understandings of prayer. Have you experimented with other ways of praying? What worked for you? What didn't?

How are you a praying person of God?

- What will you do to have a consistent time of prayer in the week ahead?
- How will you begin to pray continually?

Closing prayer

Loving God, sometimes we take this moment for granted. Forgive us when we neglect our times of prayer, when we fail to recognize what an amazing privilege it is to speak to you and know that we have the ear of the Almighty. Teach us what it means to pray continually. Amen.

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GRACE-FILLED

Amazing Grace (verse 2, UM Hymnal 378)

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

Ephesians 2:8-10

You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

'Salvation by Faith' by John Wesley

All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of [God's] mere grace, bounty, or favour; [God's] free, undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of [God's] mercies. It was free grace that "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul," and stamped on that soul the image of God, and "put all things under his feet." The same free grace continues to us, at this day, life, and breath, and all things. For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God's hand. "All our works, Thou, O God, hast wrought in us." These, therefore, are so many more instances of free mercy: and whatever righteousness may be found in man, this is also the gift of God.

[Read the full sermon](#)

Discussion starters

Grace is an important concept for United Methodists. John Wesley emphasized our dependence on grace in all aspects of life—from before we are aware of God's presence in our lives, through our initial decision to follow Jesus and to our moment of death and entrance into heaven. Every step of the way is by the grace of God.

Sing/Read "Amazing Grace"

- We know this hymn so well that we may benefit from pausing to reacquaint ourselves with the words. As you do, what images come to mind? Are there any surprises?
- How have you experienced the amazing grace of God?
- How do you continue to experience God's grace as you grow in your faith?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

- Why is it important to remember who we were before we met Jesus (verses 1-3)?
- What do you feel when you read, “You are saved by God’s grace!” (verses 4-7)?
- Verses 8-10 emphasize that our salvation is God’s action and not ours. We read, “It’s not something you did that you can be proud of.” How does this understanding of salvation help us view our faith?

Read the introductory paragraph of “Salvation by Faith” printed above

- What are your initial impressions?
- Wesley’s text for this sermon is Ephesians 2:8, which he quotes as, “By grace ye are saved through faith.” What connections do you see between this sermon and Ephesians 2:1-10, discussed earlier?
- Wesley writes, “For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God’s hand.” How does knowing that all you’ve received is an undeserved gift from God affect how you view your faith? Your church? How we are called to view and treat others?

How are you a grace-filled person of God?

- As those who have received grace, how might we share it?
- How will you share the love and grace of God with others in the days ahead?

Closing prayer

Loving God, it is only by your grace that we have been saved. Thank you for the new life we have received in Christ Jesus. Teach us to humbly receive all you are willing to give, and strengthen us—as individuals and as a church—to be gracious with others in every aspect of our lives. Amen.

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