



confirmation

a rite of passage at first united methodist church, mckinney

“I am the vine; you are the branches.
If you remain in me and I in you,
you will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:5

Hello Confirmation Class of 2021!

Welcome from Pastor Chris

I am so excited for you. This is going to be a great semester in which you get to learn more about God, meet new people, make awesome friends, and commit yourself to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you don't know what it means to be a disciple of Christ, don't worry! That's the point of this class! I hope that at the end of this journey you will have a deeper understanding of your faith, you will have made some good friends, and that you will have had the time of your life.

I want to encourage you to invite your friends to be a part of confirmation. This is an exciting time in your life, why not share it with others? If you have friends that are not going to church, then invite them to come along with you! Friends are always welcome to participate in our activities.

Finally, if you need anything this year, please contact me, Deidre, or Peyton. We are here for you, and we will do what we can to make this year the best that it can be. We are praying for you and we cannot wait to see where the Lord leads you!

In Christ,



Rev. Chris Rickwartz
Associate Pastor, Director of Youth Ministries

Welcome from Deidre

We are so excited for this semester of confirmation that is ahead of us! This is a special time in the life of your youth. Confirmation is a rite of passage for students to own their faith in Jesus Christ for themselves and to proclaim this faith to their church family. Students will be confronted with the Gospel, challenged in who THEY say Jesus is, and learn about Christ's intention for the Body of Christ. The emphasis of these classes is what students choose to do AFTER Confirmation Day is over... just as Jesus called the disciples and they followed (still having questions, failing miserably at times, but following nonetheless), we are called to follow Jesus on this life-long journey... even if we still have questions, and even if we fail. These students will be confronted with who THEY say Jesus is and if they want to follow Him and claim the name Christian and walk with the Christian community.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. We are looking forward to getting to know your families better through this process!

Blessings,



Deidre Imthurn
Director of Confirmation, Associate Director of Youth Ministries

Get to Know Your Youth Ministries Staff

Chris, Deidre, and Peyton are here to assist you in any way. Deidre will be responsible for the bulk of the weekly programming of Confirmation, and will be providing support to our volunteers who make this class happen (teachers, project leaders, etc.). You will receive communication from all three of us during this year.

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Welcome to Confirmation!

Whether you realize it or not, something big is happening in your life! You're starting a new and exciting journey of faith called ***Confirmation***. If you have no idea what that means, don't worry – pretty soon, you'll be an expert! You're going to learn all about the Christian faith, how the Church came to be, what it means to follow Christ, and more! We are *excited* for you because we know you're going to have a lot of fun and grow in your faith. You will be surrounded by friends and great adults and every week, you'll play games, hang out, grow in your faith... the list goes on! Most of all, you'll learn what it means to be a child of God and a member of God's Church. At the end of Confirmation, we hope you'll want to say "Yes!" to Christ and grow in a relationship with him.

As you go through these weeks, know that lots of people are thinking about you and praying for you! Your Confirmation teachers, church leaders, parents, "Faith Partners," pastors, and friends are behind you 100%. The entire congregation of First United Methodist Church McKinney is behind you 100%. Finally, God is behind you 100%. God wants to be in a relationship with you and lead you to a full and whole life, and God will be with you every step of your Confirmation journey.

We challenge you to take these next few months seriously because making the decision to follow Christ is a big one. Do your "homework," build relationships, listen to your teachers... most of all, enjoy God's presence and guidance throughout Confirmation. This is ***your*** Confirmation, so make the very best of it!

Your Name: _____

2021 Confirmation Schedule

Sunday, January 24 @ 4-6pm	Confirmation Orientation (followed by Comedy Show)
Sunday, January 31 @ 4:30-5:30pm	Welcome & Information
Sunday, February 7 @ 3:30-4:30pm	LESSON 1 - Super Bowl Sunday (early meeting time)
Sunday, February 14 @ 4:30-5:30pm	Valentine Event - MISD Holiday (2/15)
Sunday, February 21 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 2
Sunday, February 28 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 3
Sunday, March 7	NO CLASS – Spring Break
March 6-11	Spring Break Mission Week
Sunday, March 14 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 4
Sunday, March 21 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 5
Sunday, March 28 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 6
Sunday, April 4	NO CLASS – Easter!
Sunday, April 11 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 7
Sunday, April 18 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 8
Sunday, April 25 @ 4:30-5:30pm	LESSON 9
Sunday, May 2, 12:30 – 5:30 pm	Confirmation Spring Retreat/Confirmation Rehearsal
Friday/Saturday, May 7/8	<u>YOUR BIG DAY – Confirmation Service!</u>

Confirmation... WHAT?!

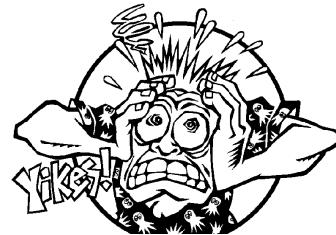
So, what exactly *is* Confirmation? Some of you may have been looking forward to it or maybe some of you may be here because your parents are making you “be confirmed” because it’s what you’re supposed to do. Others of you may just want to meet new friends, or stand up in front of church and look cool on Confirmation Sunday or are curious about the whole faith thing. Whatever your story, it’s a good one, and YOU are an important part of Confirmation. We are so glad you’re here and look forward to this time with you. Now, let’s get started!



“Sign me up!”



“Uhhh... what?”



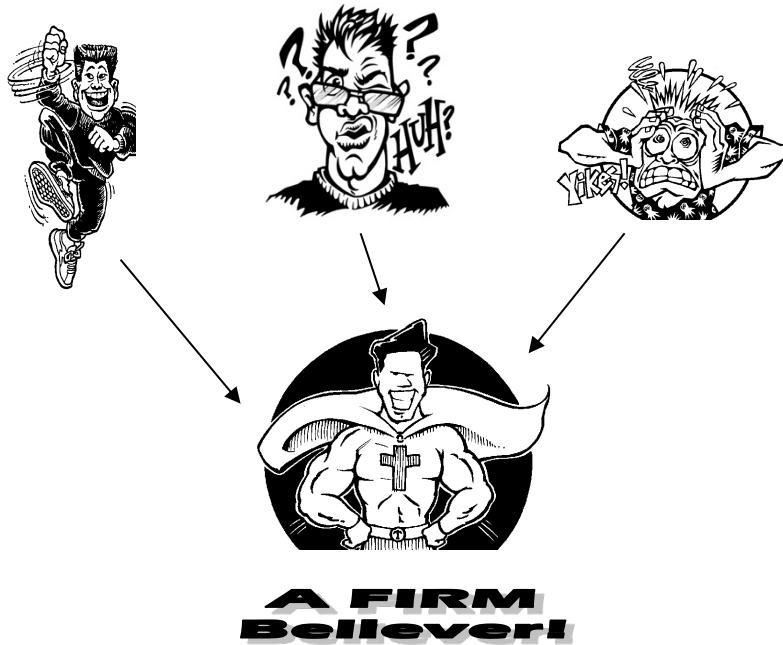
“NOOOOO!!!”

The word Confirmation means “**with firmness**” (“con”= with (as in *chili con queso* – *chili with cheese*); “firm-ation”= firmness). As we are in Confirmation, we are taking the things we’ve heard about God and “making them firm” for our lives. More than likely, though, when it comes to what each of us knows about God, we’re all a little different. You will probably fit into one of these categories. See which one best describes you:

- You know about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit because your parents, friends, pastors, teachers, etc. have told you about Him. Besides that, you’ve gone to church and/or a Christian school your entire life, so you’ve heard most of the big Bible stories and can tell others how they relate to your life.
- You’ve heard a lot about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit and have read a bunch of Bible stories, but it all seems like a bunch of baloney. This Confirmation thing is just silly, and you’re only doing it because your parents are making you.
- You don’t know much (or anything at all!) about God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Either your parents haven’t made you come to church, or you haven’t had the opportunity to come to church. As you come into Confirmation, you don’t really know what to expect and may or may not be curious.

FYI - It doesn’t matter what category you fit into... what matters is what you make of this experience! **Confirmation is everyone’s chance to learn!** If you take these next few months seriously and keep an open mind and an open heart, you’ll be an expert when you finish. It won’t matter at all what you knew when you first started – what will matter is what you do with what you learn during

your experience. It is our hope that on your Confirmation Day you will like what you've learned and "make it firm" for your life!



What things do we "make firm" in Confirmation?

(Don't feel overwhelmed if you don't know what all this stuff means – you will!)

One thing we make firm in Confirmation is **God's grace**. The Greek word for grace in the New Testament is *charis*, which means "gift." God's grace is His gift of love, kindness, and forgiveness to us and the world, *just because*. Grace is not something we earn (like an A on a test after we study really hard) or something we're "good enough for" (like making the drill team or soccer team); it is something given to us by God through Jesus Christ. In Confirmation we learn about and experience grace, and then we decide what we're going to do with it!

Another thing we "make firm" in Confirmation is our **baptism**. Baptism, in one way or another, involves water as a symbol of God's gift of love and grace to us. God created us; God loves us. Baptism is a sacred thing, and we all have different experiences with it:

- Some of us were baptized as babies, before we were able to respond to God's love. If this is the case, we probably don't remember it. Our parents brought us in front of the church, and God did God's thing! God's love through the Holy Spirit was accepted for us by our parents until we were old enough to accept it for ourselves. If you were baptized as a child, Confirmation is your opportunity to "remember your baptism." It's your time to say, "I know accept God's love for myself. I choose to 'make firm' my baptism and continue to live my life in God's love."
- Some of us have not been baptized yet! Now don't worry - God loves us just as much as God does those who have been baptized; we just have not received the sacrament of the water on our heads. If you have not been baptized yet, Confirmation can be your time to be baptized.

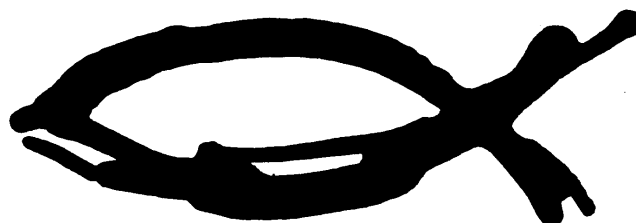
You can choose to accept God’s love for you through the Holy Spirit and commit to a life in that love as you chose to be baptized.

Finally, in Confirmation, we “make firm” our **commitment**. This means that we take an honest look at the Christian faith and decide whether or not we want to claim it for ourselves. Do I believe that God created me and loves me? Do I want to admit that I’m not perfect, and I fall short of what God calls me to be? Do I accept that God forgives my sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? These are tough questions, but they are at the heart of Confirmation. If we do decide to “claim the name ‘Christian,’” we commit to these beliefs and to making Jesus Christ #1 in our lives. That doesn’t mean we live the perfect life – we can’t! We can, though, (and should!) live our lives the best we can for Christ. As Confirmands, we are past the point of being children, and though we are not adults yet, we *are* old enough to make our own decisions concerning our faith.

The greatest part of Confirmation is that it gives us a chance to make our relationship with Jesus Christ a very real and personal thing in our lives. You’ll learn all about what a relationship with Christ means in the next few weeks, but for now, here’s a sneak peek:

- God as your *best friend!* Your **#1 fan!**
- choosing to go to church rather than your parents’ “making” you go
- being *active* in the church (not just “going”)
- reading the Bible to get to know God better
- talking and listening to God in prayer
- hanging out with Christian friends who love God and are cool like He is!
- doing God’s work (loving and helping others and showing the world God’s love and power!)
- making decisions that God is proud of
- telling others about Christ in your schools, families, sport teams, neighborhoods
- growing! Learning more about the Church, the Christian faith, yourself, and God
- having fun with the Spirit of God! The Holy Spirit is your way to enjoy God’s presence, guidance, and blessings.

Whew! It seems like there’s a lot to this process! Well, there is, and we hope you take it seriously. We also hope you have a lot of fun, too, though! It’s going to be 3 months of learning, growing, praying, and playing that will change your life for the better. Know that as you “make firm your faith,” God’s Spirit – through the Church - will be with you and will guide you. ***Enjoy the journey!***



“The Basics” of Confirmation

GOD: This is kind of a given, but really and truly, we will learn all about God during Confirmation. We’ll learn who God is, what God has done and continues to do, and what God has to do with us.

RELATIONSHIPS: During Confirmation, one of the most important things we will do is build relationships with God and each other. The Great Commandment that Jesus gave us is to *love* – love God and love our neighbor. In all we do these next few months, we will be trying to live out this commandment. That means we will be getting to know others, sharing our faith with each other, and enjoying fellowship. We’re going to be all about relationships in Confirmation this year!

WEEKLY CLASSES: For the next few months, we will get together to talk about our faith. We’ll go over what it means to be a Christian and a United Methodist, how our faith came to be, and how to live our lives for Christ today. We’ll ask and answer questions, hang out, read Scripture, pray, and play together!

READING: As fun as weekly classes are, they are only part of Confirmation. The rest of the good times come in this handy-dandy Confirmation manual. Each week you’ll have a lesson of reading to do to prepare for your class time. Have no fear, though! Your reading is relatively short, and it is all VERY important. Trust us; you don’t want to miss out on what’s in here... it will make all the difference in your Confirmation experience! (P.S. An even cooler book than this one is your Bible; bring it to class with you!)

WORSHIP: Worship is an important part of the confirmation journey. Our expectation is that each family will be in worship each week. For right now, that means carving out time to worship together online, whether you do that as the services are livestreamed or at a different time is not important, but it is important that you do this together and talk about what you experience. We hope that as a family you will share what is meaningful to you in each service.

JOURNALING: There is a “Journal” page at the end of each of your lessons. We encourage you to use this space to write any thoughts, prayers, and/or questions you have as you read through the lesson each week. Journaling is a great spiritual discipline that can really help us grow in our faith and come to know God more!

FAITH PARTNERS: You will have several adult friends who will participate with you in your Confirmation: your teachers, your pastor, your parents, and your “Faith Partner.” Your Faith Partner will be your “special buddy” or “mentor” during Confirmation. He or she is there for you to talk to about your faith and Confirmation experience, support you in your Christian walk, and just hang out with you for fun!

YOUR PARENTS: Your parents are there for you to talk with at home as you go through Confirmation. Talk with them about your experience over meals, while you’re riding with them in the car, or at home after church or school so that they can share in your journey of faith.

YOUTH MINISTRY ACTIVITIES: Confirmation is not the only fun at First Methodist McKinney! You are transitioning into the larger youth ministries of our church. It can be a little confusing at times, but just remember that we will go out of our way to mark events you are invited to with the words Confirmation or 6th Grade. As soon as you are Confirmed, you will be invited to all youth ministry activities that we do (including all summer activities and summer camp). Confirmation is a focused time, and we want you to keep Confirmation activities the priority during this class. But once the class is over, we hope that you will make youth ministry activities a part of your life!

To Be Confirmed or Not to be Confirmed... **THAT IS THE QUESTION**

It's up to you! Read below about the decision to be confirmed. What does it mean? What if you're not ready? Is now your only chance?

If I am confirmed, what happens?

- We will either “remember your baptism” (if you have already been baptized) or baptize you. The United Methodist Church accepts all previous baptisms and gets excited about all *new* baptisms because baptism is a symbol of God’s unconditional love for each and every one of us, and it begins or continues a lifetime journey of faith!
- At your Confirmation, one of our pastors will direct hands to be placed on you. This is a sign from Scripture of begin “set apart.” Moses laid hands on Joshua when it was Joshua’s turn to lead and, in the New Testament, whenever people were sent out for ministry it was signified by the laying on of hands. You will be surrounded (either physically, virtually, or in spirit) by other Christians as we pray for you and set you apart for a life of following Jesus.
- You will join the church! Actually, you will join several churches! You will be a member of Christ’s universal Church (with a capital C - all Christians around the world), the United Methodist Church (our denomination), and First United Methodist Church of McKinney.
- You will be sent out into the world! As a Confirmation graduate, you will be a disciple of Jesus Christ – called to love and serve all those around you and be God’s light in the world.
- You will begin a lifetime journey! One of the best things about being a Christian is that you never stop growing. *Get excited* because as long as you live, you’ll be getting to know God better and experiencing His goodness in bigger and better ways!

Why now?

Well, obviously, now is a great time to be confirmed because you’re going through Confirmation! ☺ This year is your special opportunity to say “yes!” to Christ. As you grow into your teenage years and beyond, you are old enough to be responsible for your own faith. You no longer need to rely on what others tell you about being a Christian – you can “claim the name” *Christian* for yourself!

Now is also a good time to be confirmed because Confirmation teaches you a lot about the Christian faith that you may otherwise never know. It’s great preparation for taking the big step into the Christian faith. Plus, your Confirmation Day gives you the chance to be up at the front of the church and make a formal declaration of your decision. Yes, you can wait to be confirmed, but if you feel ready to respond to God’s love to you in Christ, now is the perfect time to commit!

What if I decide I don't want to be confirmed... at least not yet?

That's fine! *You do not have to be confirmed.* You can be confirmed later on in your life, or you don't ever have to be confirmed. What matters to God in your relationship with Him is your heart, not your Confirmation graduation certificate. If you choose not to be confirmed, you are still welcome to participate in any and all church or youth activities. What we ask of you as you go through Confirmation is that you take the experience seriously and keep an open mind and an open heart. Please be respectful of all who are enjoying Confirmation and never underestimate the ways God can touch your heart and change your mind during these next few months.

Our prayer for all of you – whether you say yes or no to being confirmed – is the same:

“... that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:17-19



LESSON 1

Church: Where it's at!

So – first thing's first! Let's figure out where we are for this Confirmation journey and what's going to go on here the next few months. As you've already heard, Confirmation is all about God and people. What better place to talk about these things than the church? From now until the end of Confirmation, you're going to be meeting here at First Methodist McKinney to find out what Christian belief is all about. You'll learn things like "Who is God? Who am I?" and "What is my life supposed to be about?" all in the context of a loving family - your church.

In this lesson, we're going to learn about what makes a church, a church. From the beginning, the Church has been a Christian family that gets together to worship God and live out God's love to each other and to the world. The Bible refers to the Church as "the body of Christ" (Romans 12:5) because it is God's way of continuing Jesus' ministry on earth. The Church is made up of many people, like one's body is made up of many parts. It can't function properly without all of the people in it (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The Church is not perfect because people are not perfect, but God has blessed the Church because His Word is preached and lived out in it. In the book of Acts in the Bible, we learn about the first Christian Church. It can be a model for our church today.

PENTECOST

First, the sound of a violent wind filled the room. Yahweh's breath blew as it had blown on the ancient chaos to bring forth creation, as it had blown on the womb of Mary to form the New Creation.



Cool picture, huh? The Church started on a day you may have heard of – the *Day of Pentecost*. Jesus had died on the cross and risen from the dead; at this point, he was hanging out with God in heaven. Meanwhile, all of his disciples and the people around them were hanging out on earth. On this Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down on these people. Peter preached to the people and told them about the love and power of Jesus, and by the end of the day, 3,000 people converted to Christianity! You can read this story for yourself in Acts, chapter 2. After these people became Christians, they became committed to God and to each other and formed the first churches.

Peter, later a saint (Saint Peter), is known as the “rock” on which the early Church was built. He was the preacher on that powerful day of Pentecost!!



The churches were not without problems, though. A lot of people didn't like others' excitement over the new Christian faith because it was a threat to their government and every day life. After all, the way of Jesus was love and forgiveness, not rules and law. The Romans came in 70 AD and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, which was where the Christians called home. This forced the Christians to separate and find homes in other places. This was tough for them to do, but God used the tragedy to grow the church and connect more people to Jesus. Because they all had to move, they could start churches wherever they went. The result? The number of churches grew!

Life was still hard for the Christians, though. Romans went around persecuting them because they would not worship Caesar, the ruler at the time. Being a Christian became a very dangerous thing. The people still believed, though, and they wanted their churches and their faith to grow. Lots of letters in the New Testament were written during this time. These letters were encouraging to the people. They were kind of like “How To” books for the Christian faith (Ex: “How to love others” or “How to make the right decisions”). The letters (also called “epistles”) talked really openly about the Christian faith and problems that the Church was facing, and they also reminded the people of the teachings of Christ so they would continue to live out their faith every day. A lot of them were written by a guy named Paul, and they were passed along from one church to another. Before long, not only were there *more* churches, but there were more *faithful* churches!

You may wonder, “So what?” “What does the history of church have to do with Confirmation or with me?” Good question! The first churches are super important to your Confirmation

experience and to your life because they are the model for our churches today. If you're going to be a member of First Methodist McKinney by the end of these next few months, knowing more about the early church will help you be a responsible member of *today's* Church and enjoy your Christian community!

Read Acts 2:42-47 below... it describes what Christians call the "early church":

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (NRSV)

From the Scripture, notice the characteristics of the early church:

They learned: The Scripture says that the new believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The apostles (you may know them as disciples) were Jesus' best friends, so they knew him really well! These men had spent a ton of time with Jesus, so whatever they had to say helped the people learn more about Jesus' life and how he wanted them to live. They probably told stories about when Jesus was with them, what he was like, and what he had to say about God, his Father. Hearing from Jesus' disciples taught the people the basics of the Christian faith and encouraged them as they changed their lives for Christ.

They took part in fellowship: Fellowship (*koinonia* in Greek, the language the New Testament was written in) is basically Christian friendship. It was really important in the early church. Fellowship meant that the people gathered together and enjoyed their time with each other. They were interested in each other's lives, they loved and cared for each other deeply, and they had fun together as Christians!

They had their meals together: Believe it or not, *eating* was an important part of the early church! Obviously, the early Christians had communion together (think "Last Supper"), but they also ate other meals too. They ate together because it was fun and because it was a great way for them to spend time together in fellowship. Having meals with friends strengthened their relationships and allowed them the chance to sit and talk about their lives and their faith. Think about how many times Jesus ate with people! At the home of Simon, feeding the five thousand, going to Zaccheus's house, the Last Supper... Jesus obviously placed great value on mealtime, so the early Christians did too!

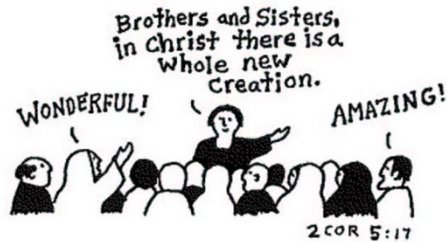


They prayed: The early Christians knew how important prayer was. How could they survive the daily struggles and hard times of life if they didn't communicate with God? Likewise, how could they express their thanks to God and praise God without praying? Jesus was the perfect model for prayer. In the midst of all he did on earth, he always took time to be alone with God in prayer and to tell others about the importance of prayer (See Matthew 26:36-44; Mark 6:45-46; Luke 11:1-13.).

They served and shared: This means that the people in the early Church always did things for each other and for those outside their churches. The Scripture above says that they shared their belongings with each other, and they gave to those who were in need.

They loved God, and they loved each other: The early Christians loved God so much that they got together *every day* to talk about God and praise God! In the same way, they loved their friends so much that they ate with them "*with glad and sincere hearts.*" Now, read the Scripture above again. Do you notice the result of the people's great love for God and for each other? "*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*" That's powerful love!

COSMIC KOINONIA!



The Bible shows us that these early Christians were really happy and joyful people after they heard the Good News of Jesus on that Day of Pentecost. Their lives were literally changed! No longer did they care only about themselves – they cared about others. No longer were they alone - they had found a friend in God and in their new Christian brothers and sisters. The same is true for us today. No matter what denomination we are, we are supposed to do the same things in *our* churches as the early Christians did in *their* churches. Let's see how the early church is the model for our church today.

We learn: Well, obviously, Jesus' twelve disciples do not talk to us today in our churches! Great ministers, teachers, friends, and role models do, though. All of these people know God through their experiences with God, so we can learn from their stories and lives. We can also learn from the Bible, which is God's #1 tool for us in the church and in our lives. It tells us all about God and how God wants us to live. There are a million other ways we can learn about God and our faith in the church – small groups, sermons, Student Life, Bible studies... *the list is endless!*

We are in fellowship: It's a blast to enjoy life with other Christians in the church! We can all hang out in fellowship in Confirmation, at Youth Group, on mission trips, during worship, in Sunday School, in small groups, and doing other fun stuff. When we get together, it's important that we share our lives with each other and listen to each other. God calls us to be happy when our friends are happy and sad when they are sad: *"If one part of the body (church) suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share in its happiness,"* (1 Corinthians 12:26). It is fun and rewarding to share our lives and faith with our Christian friends!

We eat! You'll see that food is a part of many church gatherings! We *love* to eat together! From donuts on Sunday morning to Youth Group meals, food is one thing that brings folks together.

We know Jesus did great ministry during mealtime, so we follow his example. Let mealtime be a chance for you to hang out with friends and feel at home in the church!

We pray: As Christians, we are called to follow the example of Christ. Prayer is one of the best things we can do to be like him. Prayer in the church joins us together in communication with God. It allows us to praise God for who God is, confess our sins, give God thanks, and express to God what we need. Praying grows us individually and as a church, so it is vital that we do it every time we meet!

We serve and share: As the body of Christ, we should feel responsible for each other and for our church. God has given us each other to take care of one another, so we must show love and concern to everyone in our church. We must also care for our church and its ministries. Instead of putting ourselves first, we should put God first by giving our money, time, and service to God's work in the church. Finally, God calls us to care for those outside the church. This is why the United Methodist Church does so much for those who are in need. We feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger (See Matthew 25:31-46). By looking after others, we show the world how much God loves us all and how much we love God and God's people!

We love God, and we love each other: Just like the people of the early church, we are supposed to get excited about God and the difference God's made in our lives! We should worship God with happy hearts and love our friends in the church. God's love is HUGE, and God wants us to experience it as much as possible. The best thing we can do in the church today is love God completely and then love everyone around us. The more we love God and others in the church, the more people outside the church will come to know Christ! How exciting!!

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

If you're pumped about the early church and want to know more, research the Day of Pentecost. When did it start? What is its history? How has it changed since?

LESSON 2

What's my Christian Heritage?

****Check out the "Church History Chart" at the end of this lesson to see our Family Tree!***

OK - so now we know about the Church and how it came to be. Now let's look at what happened in between the first church and our church today. This is super important as we try to understand what we believe and why, as well as how, our faith and denomination (United Methodist... versus, say, Baptist or Presbyterian) got to be what they are. There are three main questions that will help us figure all this stuff out:

- 1.) What does *Protestant* mean?
- 2.) Who was *John Wesley*?
- 3.) What makes me *Methodist*?

Let's look at these questions one at a time.

1.) What does *Protestant* mean?

The word *Protestant* comes from *The Protestant Reformation* led by Martin Luther. Maybe you've heard about it. Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483, to a peasant miner and his wife. Luther went to prep school and then to the University of Erfurt, where he graduated in 1505.

Luther's parents wanted him to have a career in law, so after college he went to law school. During this time, Luther was heavily influenced by a religious revival. He had started to feel really bad about mistakes he had made in his life (a fancy word for this is "sin") and worry about what would happen to him after he died. Luther also almost got struck by lightning and then was shocked by the sudden death of one of his very best friends. Needless to say, life was pretty stinky for Luther for a while. In the midst of all of these really hard times, he just wanted to be alone. He wanted to experience God in his life, so before too long, he quit law school and entered a monastery!

Luther loved life in the monastery! He spent a ton of time figuring out what real salvation was and how he and others could receive it. He had felt really guilty about how sinful he was and wanted to start over again. After a lot of time alone, reading Scripture, and praying, Luther realized that if he was going to understand salvation the way it really was, he was going to have to understand *God* the way God really was. Up until this point, people saw God as someone who expected perfection. If they messed up, they had to *do* something to make God forgive them. Luther didn't think this was right, though. He believed that God had taken care of sin a long time ago when God sent Jesus, so God was really more loving and merciful than God was mad and unforgiving. In fact, the more sinful Luther realized he was, the better and more loving he realized God was! Luther then understood that salvation had everything to do with God's love and mercy and nothing to do with what people had, did, or were.

HAVE YOU EVER FELT THIS WAY? Describe a time when you felt or believed that God’s love was WAY bigger than the mistakes you’d made.

Luther’s thinking challenged a lot of what Christians believed at the time. The Roman Catholic Church sold certificates of forgiveness called “indulgences.” Catholics taught that people had to literally *buy* these certificates in order to be forgiven. Luther thought this was not only bizarre, but it was also unbiblical (i.e. not what the Bible said) and wrong. It was crazy to think that forgiveness could come by *buying something* instead of by God! Luther was so frustrated that he wrote all of his thoughts and arguments out on paper. Then, on October 31, 1517, he nailed them to the Castle Church door at Wittenberg. This famous paper is called the *Ninety-Five Theses*.

Luther knew that doing this would cause a ruckus, but he figured the arguments over his Theses would be small. And besides that, he figured that after they argued, the church officials would realize they were wrong and change their doctrine (Doctrine is just a fancy word for a system of belief.). Unfortunately, it wasn’t quite that easy, though. Luther got stuck in debate that lasted for years, and he had to stand trial in Germany. Then the court ordered him to quit and take back his arguments, but he refused. Even a ban was made against Luther! He *still* wouldn’t stop, though! He was committed to his cause and refused to back down.



Martin Luther... Rebel With a Cause!

Even though lots of people didn’t like Luther’s thoughts, tons of Christians around the world loved what he stood for and made him a hero. Because he was “protesting” so much, Luther’s followers called his movement “Protestant.” The Reformation grew and grew, and eventually, the Christian faith changed dramatically. Now we call ourselves *Protestant* because our thinking was shaped by Martin Luther, who led the Protestant Reformation. Rather than think we can buy our forgiveness or earn it somehow, we put our whole trust in God. His goodness gives us grace, love, and forgiveness that we could never get on our own.

2.) Who was John Wesley?



So now we know how Protestants, as opposed to Catholics, came to be. Our next task is to figure out who John Wesley was and why he is important to our Christian faith. John Wesley was the man who started the Methodist Church. He was born in 1703 to an Anglican clergyman and his wife, Samuel and Susanna Wesley. He was one of 19 children! John went to Oxford and was an ordained priest in the Church of England. He also served briefly at Epworth and then returned to Oxford to be a resident tutor.

While John was at school, he always wanted to grow in his relationship with Christ. He was very disciplined, so he woke up early in the morning to read his Bible, pray, and serve the poor of the city. After all this, though, he still did not feel like he had reached the closeness with God that he wanted. A few years later, his brother, Charles, came to Oxford to study. The two of them formed a group of Christians who met together for prayer, Bible study, fasting, visiting prisoners in jail, serving others, and doing all kinds of other stuff. All they did was very organized, structured, and *methodical* (they followed a *method*... think “scientific method” from science class). This practice of Christianity became known as *Methodist*.

On a scale of 1-10, how “methodical” would you say your Christian faith and practice are? Do you spend much time in Bible study, prayer, and service to others? How “methodical” would you say most Methodists are?

In 1735 John became a chaplain in the new colony in Georgia. He still did not feel like he had experienced inner peace from his faith, though. After a few years, he became frustrated that he wasn't satisfied. Finally, John met a man named Peter Boehler, a German pietist. Peter taught him his belief that the Christian life begins with a “soul-shaking, instantaneous conversion experience that is supported by one's inner feelings of assurance of faith” (*Journey to Discipleship*).

John experienced this “inner feeling” on May 24, 1738. He went to a meeting that he really didn't want to go to, and a man was reading a piece of Martin Luther's (remember him?) writing. John said the man was describing “the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ.” During the reading, John said, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death” (*Journey to Discipleship*).

This moment was HUGE for Wesley! It, and many others he experienced afterwards, turned him into a man convinced of God’s love, forgiveness, power, and grace. He began to call his Christianity “the religion of the warmed heart,” and from then on, Wesley was super excited to go out and tell others about Christ!

**Recognize this cross and flame?
It’s the official cross of the
Methodist Church and
represents Wesley’s
“warmed heart” sensation!**



Now, as we’ve already talked about, Wesley was a really organized guy. (Remember... *Methodist* came from his *methodical* practice.) Before he died in 1791, he used his organization to form groups of adults into societies that got together for prayer, Bible study, discipline, and service. These people then grew to preach the Gospel, visit the sick, and minister to the poor. Before long, Methodism became a really big movement in Christianity. Rather than focus too much on the “rules” of religion, Methodists looked to be better disciples of Jesus, live out their faith every day, and experience God all around them.

3.) What makes me *Methodist*?

(*Note: in 1968, *The Methodist Church* and *The Evangelical Brethren Church* united to become the *United Methodist Church*, which is technically our denomination. Most of what we believe, though, comes from John Wesley’s Methodist movement, so we’ll refer to ourselves as simply “Methodists” throughout this book.)

There are a few things that make Methodists, Methodists. A Methodist:

- believes in God ~ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ~ and accepts Jesus Christ as his or her Savior
- believes in what the Old and New Testaments (i.e. the Bible) have to say about God, humans, and the Christian life and faith
- promises to be committed to God’s Kingdom and purposes
- lives the Christian life
- supports the church with prayers (communicating with God), presence (going to worship, being involved in Sunday School, etc.), gifts (sharing talents, giving money, etc.), service (service projects, mission trips, etc.), and witness (showing and telling other people about the faith)

**FYI – If you choose to be confirmed, you’ll be asked to commit to these five things on Confirmation Sunday!*

Methodists believe in:

God’s grace – God’s free gift of love for everyone. We cannot earn God’s love, we cannot buy it, and we cannot be “good enough” for it. We can only accept it. Jesus showed God’s grace when he

ate with sinners, died on the cross, and rose from the grave. God's grace in Christ forgives our sins, lets us grow closer to Christ and to each other, and allows us to experience joy as God's children... basically, it changes our lives! *Read John 4:9-11 for a great description of grace!

Methodists believe in:

Salvation by faith. To be "saved" from something literally means to be rescued or delivered from it (see Webster). This is usually a good thing since the things we normally want to be saved from are bad, dangerous, and/or hurtful. (Think about being "saved" from drowning... we are rescued from death!) In the Christian sense, being "saved" by faith means God gives us a "life jacket" (Jesus) to rescue us forever from mistakes we make and our sinful nature in general. We cannot earn salvation by good works, "being nice," or "doing the right thing." These things are what we do to say "thank you" to God for His great love and grace (James 2:17). *Eternal life is a gift that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.* We need only to accept it and continue to live it out.

Methodists believe in:

The importance of being involved in social concerns and outreach. How can we tell others about Jesus and show his love if we only live for ourselves? Methodism has always shown interest in human problems such as poverty, suffering, and unfairness. The men and women who worked with John Wesley always helped the less fortunate. Jesus always reached out to the needy. Methodists have formed a "social creed" that we follow in caring for others with God's love.

Methodists believe in:

Experiencing God through both emotion and intellect. It is important to make our Christian faith a reality in our hearts *and* in our heads. We should *feel* God's presence and *think* about the way God is at work in our world and in our lives. Doing one without the other could be dangerous!

Methodists believe in:

A connectional and an ecumenical church. Wow ~ those are big words! Basically, *connectional* means that all Methodists are "connected" because we share common beliefs. We connect to all Methodist churches around the world with the same mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ. "Ecumenical" means "the entire universe." *All* Christians, every denomination throughout the world, form one Church to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ! The Methodist Church is both connectional and ecumenical because we believe that God calls the Christian Church to be unified.

What's important to know about Methodists is that we want every person to know, understand, experience, and accept God's constant love, forgiveness, presence, and power in Jesus Christ. Rather than focusing too much on doctrine, rules, and theology (even though these things are important!), we look to reach others and bring them into a new birth and conversion experience much like John Wesley's. As mentioned, Methodists practice Christianity with their hearts just as much as their heads. John Wesley did a lot of reading, thinking, praying, and fasting, but none of these activities would have been as meaningful for him if he would not have felt the strange warming in his heart. Finally, remember that Methodism is only one of many great Protestant denominations in the Christian faith. All come from the New Testament Church (the first one that started on the Day

of Pentecost), and all have been *reborn* through the Protestant Reformation. *Most importantly, all honor and glorify God who gives us life, love, fun, power, and grace through Jesus Christ!*

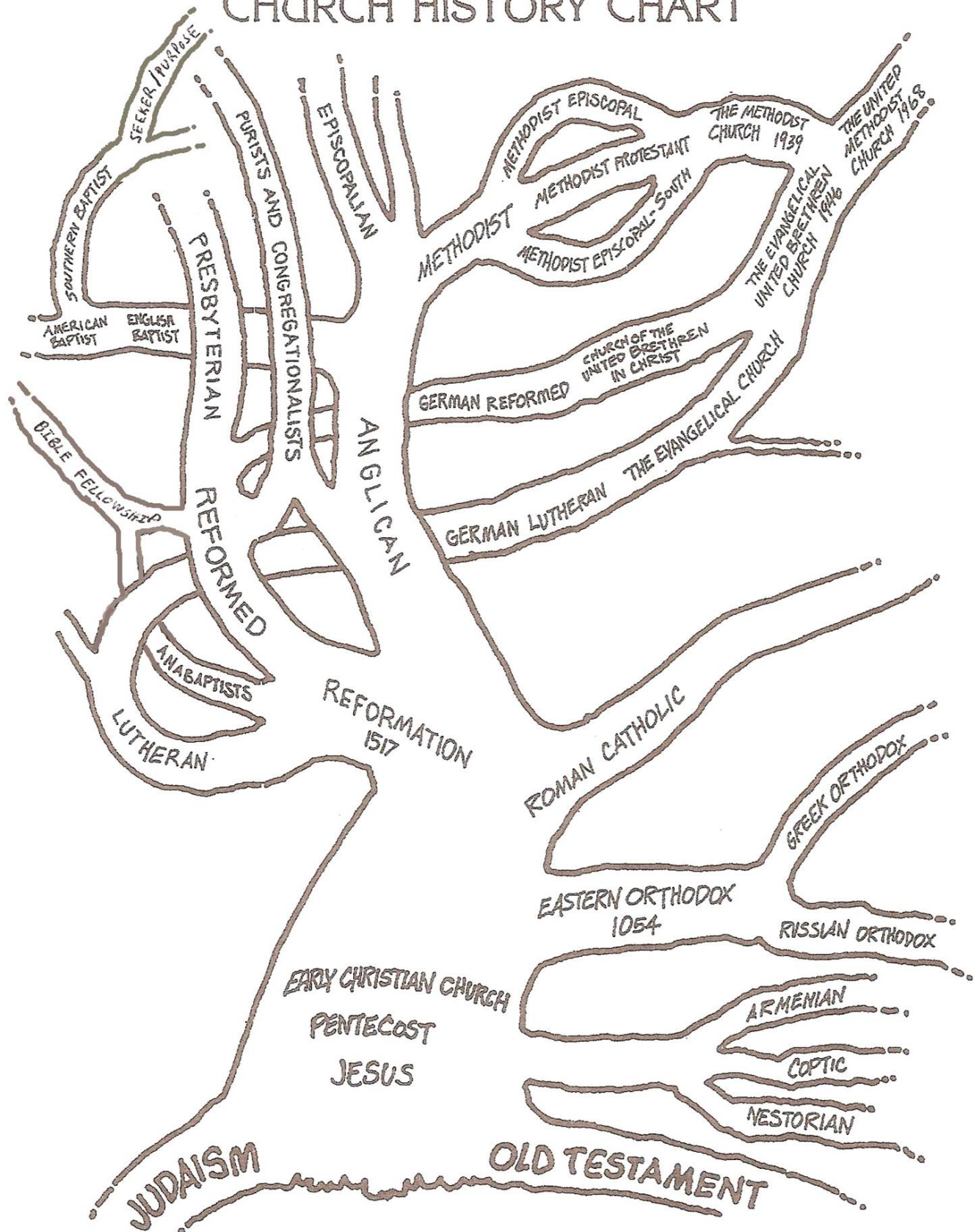
*Want to know more about Methodism? Visit the official website of the United Methodist Church: www.umc.org.

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Think about these beliefs and pray about whether or not they are something you're already willing to commit to. If you are, write out a personal statement of your belief in God and the Church. Keep it with you forever and never forget how much GOD LOVES YOU!!



CHURCH HISTORY CHART



LESSON 3

Who is God? Who am I?

So... all this belief – past, present, and future - is based on GOD. You may be wondering, *Who is this God? How is the Christian God similar to and/or different from the Muslim God or the Jewish God or the many Hindu gods? Besides all that, what does this God have to do with me?*

The truth is, we all have different ideas of God, some of which are good and right and true, and others that might not be. Even if we have the best intentions, we often paint the wrong picture of God and who God is in relationship to us. Rather than letting the Bible teach us about who God is, we make up our own ideas of who we think God is and what God is supposed to do. Can you relate to any of the following images of God?

God as **SHERIFF or JUDGE**: “I’m here to keep you in line. You’re not allowed to have any fun or make mistakes. You’re supposed to follow my laws and do what I tell you to do – no exceptions. I’ve got my eye on you. If you mess up, that’s it – you’re condemned!”

God as **TEDDY BEAR**: “Awww... I’m just here to make you feel ‘warm and fuzzy’! You could never do anything wrong in my eyes. It’s OK if you make mistakes and disobey me. I’ll still love you and snuggle up next to you.”

God as **VENDING MACHINE**: “What do you want? I’m here for you! You want forgiveness, here it is! You want a lot of money? Take it! You want an A on your test? Done! Just ask, push the button, and you’ll get just what you want.”

God as **DISTANT GRANDPARENT**: “I love you, but I’m far away from you. I created the world, but now all I really do is sit back and watch over it. I created you too, but I don’t take much interest in your life, and I don’t help you. My main job is just to send you “blessings” from afar and make sure you feel loved every once in a while.”

The truth is, God is so much more than the things listed above! Sure, God is loving and always with us, but God’s certainly not here to give us everything we want! And of course, there are things we should and should not do, but God’s main job is not to condemn us. Most importantly, God is anything but distant!! Our God is much more wonderful and complex than any of the simple descriptions above. As we look to the Bible and the history of the Church, we find a tricky, but awesome way to understand God.

THE TRINITY refers to the three different “Persons” of the Christian God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It might just be one of the most important beliefs the Christian faith has. Let’s take some time to find out about each “Person” of God so that we can understand God more.

God the Father

“In the beginning God
created the heavens
and the earth.”

[GEN 1:1 - 2:4a]

God the Father goes by “God.” ☺ Though many times (even in this book!) we talk about God as “He,” God is neither male nor female. He is not black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, or any other ethnicity. The best way to label God may just be what He (or She or It or whatever!) says in the Bible: “I am” (John 8:58). God just *is*. Christians believe God is *the Beginning* and *the End* (Revelation 1:8,17). God existed before anything else did, and God will exist forever because nothing can be in existence without Him.

In ancient times, people thought there were lots of gods. They believed these gods existed as forces of nature, so they worshipped the gods of fire, rain, and thunder. This means they never knew more about the gods than what the weather did. As you can imagine, then, these gods were really unpredictable and totally hard to relate to! The people tried to do everything right so that the gods wouldn’t get mad and destroy them (like a tornado might). They feared their gods, rather than loving and trusting them.

The Hebrew people (the ancestors of today’s Jewish and Christian people) saw God completely differently. They believed there was one God, and this God was sovereign (totally in charge of everything) and holy (set apart). God was huge, and the Hebrews were amazed by Him! As big as He was though, the Hebrews also believed that God was personal and interested in the lives of the people He created. God was God for the whole world but also for each person.

The Christian faith continues with the Hebrews’ belief of God. We too worship one God, who is in charge of everything, perfect, and loving to His people. We also are amazed at how God can be as cool as He is. He created an entire *world* and then created people and loves them completely! Christians believe that God shows His love in an even greater way than just Creation, though. We believe that God came to earth as Jesus, His Son, who is the Messiah (Jewish people expected the Messiah, but they didn’t think Jesus was him). God then sent Jesus to die on a cross so that our sins could also die and so that we could see the right way to live. Now, because God showed His love and forgiveness in this big way, we can live with God forever in heaven and be in a complete relationship with Him here on earth.

We'll probably never know (in this life!) all of what and who God is because God is so big, and we are so small. One of the fun things about being a Christian, though, is that we are always growing, so we can learn more and more about Him and what He is like every day!

God the Son

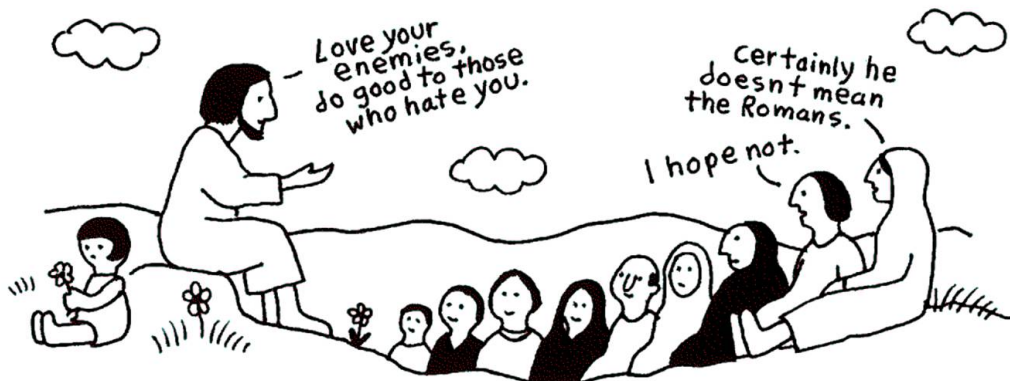
God the Son goes by "Jesus." Jesus was literally God here on the earth in human form. He was fully God, but he was also fully human. Jesus experienced all that we do here on earth today. He got tired (Mark 6:31); he was tempted (Matthew 4:1); he was emotional (Luke 19:41). He even *died*, and his death was really painful and sad (Matthew 27: 27-66). Jesus' life shows us that God wants to *be* with His people, and it serves as a model for our lives today.

Now, about Jesus: He grew up in Nazareth and became a carpenter. He worked until he was thirty years old and then began his ministry that we hear about in the Gospels (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible). Lots of people loved Jesus' preaching, and they were inspired by his miracles. The number of his followers grew quickly. Jesus had 12 disciples who were his closest friends. They went with him as he traveled, preached, and healed.



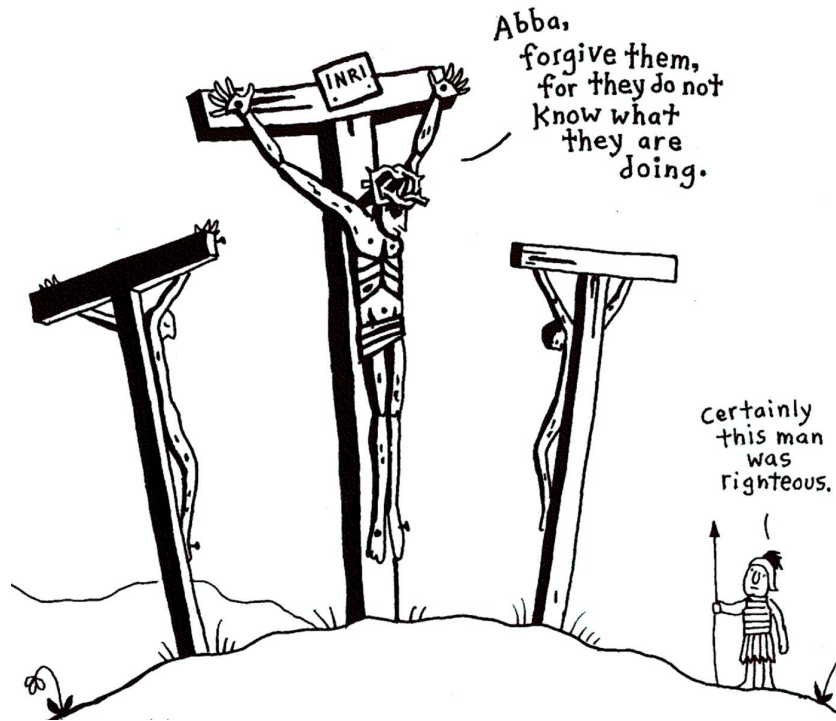


As cool as Jesus was, he did a lot of things that some people did not approve of. He ate with sinners, spent time with people who had questionable reputations, and disagreed with some of the top religious leaders of his time. He shocked people with his stories and by what he thought and said. Not only that, but Jesus said he came as *God* and as *King*, yet he walked around with the poor and needy! Tons of people thought Jesus must be crazy!!



One of the main things that made Jesus unpopular was his preaching. He attacked some of the biggest religious leaders of the day and told them that “following the rules” wasn’t the most important part of religious faith. To truly know God, he said, they needed to *believe in him* (Jesus). This made the people so mad that they captured Jesus and killed him by hanging him on a cross.

As sad as it is, the story of Jesus’ death is one of the best in the Bible because it tells us that God loves us enough to forgive the many ways we fail Him. The story also shows us how to obey God, whatever the cost. Jesus was just like any human - he didn’t *want* to die. Jesus knew that it was in God’s plan for him to die, though, so he went to the cross because he loved God that much.



Thankfully, Jesus' story did not end in death. Three days after he was crucified, Jesus rose from the dead! The resurrection story shows us that God is stronger than sin and death. It also lets us enjoy life as Christians today. As we accept the love and forgiveness of Christ, our lives change through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we experience joy on a daily basis! Jesus' resurrection showed the people in the Bible that Jesus was God – their eyes were opened to a new perspective. In the same way, when we experience Jesus' resurrection in our hearts, we get a new perspective and see life in a whole new way!



God the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit goes by “Holy Spirit.” ☺ The early followers of Christ were filled with His Spirit after he died and rose from the dead. Because of this, they were able to be bold and tell everyone the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection. And as we’ve already learned, the Holy Spirit was what started the first church (remember, the Day of Pentecost?). The Holy Spirit is *literally* God here on earth, even though Jesus is no longer here with us. Once Jesus rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit was left to live in the heart of every believer.

Today, we can live lives as Christians because of the Holy Spirit. Just look at all the different ways it helps us! The Holy Spirit:

- helps us resist temptation and choose right over wrong (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- shows us how to be loving, kind, and patient (Galatians 5:22)
- guides us when we don’t know what to do (John 16:13)
- gives us peace (Romans 8:6)
- helps us respond to God on a daily basis (2 Timothy 1:7)
- frees us from guilt (2 Corinthians 3:17)

The Holy Spirit does all these things and more! It is our constant companion—God *in* us and *with* us!

Have you ever felt the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? If so, explain what it felt like or what you experienced in the space below.

After looking at God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are now ready to “correct” our images of God. God is not a mean judge or sheriff. God is not merely a teddy bear or vending machine. God is not distant. The Bible gives us tons of true and wonderful images of the God we worship - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Check them out!

God AS GOD:

Deuteronomy 32:18	(Rock/Mother)
Psalms 23:1	(Shepherd)
Matthew 6:9	(Father)
I John 4:8	(Love)
Exodus 3:13-14	("I Am")

God as JESUS CHRIST:

Matthew 13:55	(Carpenter’s Son)
Matthew 16:16	(Son of the Living God)
John 1:38	(Rabbi, Teacher)
John 10: 11	(Good Shepherd)
Luke 2:11	(Savior, Christ (Messiah), The Lord)

God as *HOLY SPIRIT*:

John 14:26	(Counselor, Advocate, Helper, Teacher)
John 15:26	(Truth)
Acts 2:38	(Gift)
Romans 8:26	(Helps us in weakness)
Galatians 5:22	(Fruits of the Spirit)

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Read all of the Scriptures above and find what images of God mean the most to you at this point in your life. Memorize at least one of those Scriptures and as you pray to God this week, call Him by the name of that image. (Ex: Father God,...; Saving Jesus,...; Spirit of Truth,...., etc.)

LESSON 4

Why worship?

If there's one thing we want you to learn while you're in Confirmation, it's how great God is.

We can tell you about God until we're blue in the face, but it will be God's timing and your open heart and mind that will allow you to see God. The more all of us see God and experience God, the more we see just how wonderful God is. And the more wonderful we realize God is, the more we want to worship God.

Worshipping God means honoring and/or revering God. It means recognizing how awesome God is and *telling* God how awesome He is! Worship is an *active expression* of our devotion to God and a thankful response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We worship when we pray, meditate, focus on God, thank God, and dedicate ourselves to God. We can worship in church on Sunday mornings or at other "worship services," and we can worship God in our every day lives by how we act, treat others, think, speak, etc. We're going to look at both of these types of worship – *church worship* (more specifically United Methodist worship) and *every day, individual worship*.

Church worship

The first churches worshipped corporately, but their gatherings were not structured like our churches' worship today. There were no rituals and no order; they just kind of "hung out" and talked about God together (think Lesson 1, early church in *Acts*). This was cool at the beginning because everyone was free to talk about and worship God in whatever way they wanted. After a while, though, the people got out of hand. People who spoke in tongues dominated the people's time together, and communion became a rowdy Love Feast where people would actually get drunk! Finally, things got so bad that some of the church's leaders had to slow things down and make worship more organized. This explains why today we follow an "Order of Worship."

Today, corporate worship in most churches is pretty organized. Corporate worship is usually reserved for Sunday because it is the Lord's Day (you might have heard it referred to as "The Sabbath"), when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Most people worship in a church's *sanctuary* because sanctuaries are built for the purpose of corporate worship. The sanctuary is no more sacred or holy than anywhere else in God's creation, though. We can worship God anywhere, any day, any time!

It's important for us to be involved in corporate worship because it reminds us that Christianity is a community of believers. (Isn't it more fun to celebrate something (God) when you've got people with you anyway?). We can share our love for God with others, enjoy fellowship, and learn about God together. We experience corporate worship every Sunday at First United Methodist Church McKinney. There are several elements to our service and to other United Methodist services. Let's look over all of these together. (*Note: Not all of these elements are a part of every worship service. These are, however, the more common elements of a worship service.)

CALL TO WORSHIP: An invitation for everyone to come freely and worship God with thankful and joyful hearts. Often a Psalm from the Old Testament is used to do this (the pastor says one line of the psalm, and the congregation responds with another line).

AFFIRMATION: Declaring what we believe. We state our basic beliefs to remind us of who we are and what we stand for in the Christian faith. The creeds we recite (like the Apostles' creed – you'll learn more about them later!) and other statements in the Hymnal are our *affirmations* of faith.

PRAISE: Thanking God for who God is and expressing how wonderful God is. We can praise God when we sing hymns, songs, or the *Gloria Patri* (a fancy song of praise). Sometimes our words cannot say all that we want to say to God, but the music of our songs can reflect God's beauty, communicate our love and adoration to God, and lift our souls to God.

PRAYER: We pray in all kinds of ways during corporate worship! Prayer during worship is super important because it allows us to communicate with God as a community of faith. As we pray in corporate worship, we can say:

- individual, silent prayers – These are prayers we say by ourselves.
- corporate prayers with the rest of the congregation - These are the formal, traditional prayers that we say together like church liturgy and the Lord's Prayer from the Bible. These prayers are often printed in the church bulletin or hymnal.
- prayers of confession - These are prayers that admit ways we failed God. We can say them privately or as a group. Confessing sins allows us to experience God's forgiveness and be cleansed.
- prayers for others – These allow us to lift up our friends and neighbors and ask God to work in their lives.

*We can also be led by the pastor in a *pastoral prayer* (he or she lifts up general prayers to God on behalf of the congregation) or in a *prayer of thanksgiving* (he or she thanks God for everyone's blessings, God's love, etc.)

PROCLAMATION: Our opportunity to hear God's Word and will *proclaimed* (get it? *proclamation?*) or declared. The reading of Scripture and the sermon are the main ways we hear the Proclamation. The Bible teaches us what God expects from us and how to be better disciples of Christ. The sermon makes sense of the Bible in our lives today. Our minister tells stories and reviews Scripture in order to make it relevant, personal, and real in our hearts and our heads. Proclamation tells us about God and calls us to be like Him.

DEDICATION: Dedicating our lives to God (after all, it was God who *gave* us our lives!). We can do this by giving offering and by singing or reciting words of dedication. When we give our money to the church, we acknowledge that our money came from God and should be returned in part for God's work in the world. When we sing songs or say words of dedication, we are telling God that we will be committed to God's purposes in the world, and we will serve God by telling others about Christ. When we dedicate our lives to God, we say to God that what we want to do is not important. All that matters is that others come to know Christ through us.

SACRAMENTS: When we take communion and celebrate baptism (more on these in the next lesson). Most Methodist churches offer communion the 1st Sunday of every month, but some churches offer it more or less frequently. As for baptism, we baptize many people as infants. We also baptize children or adults whenever they are ready!

THANKSGIVING: Obviously, this is the part of church worship when we give thanks to God! Thanksgiving can be the *doxology* (song of praise to God) or as mentioned earlier, the *Prayer of Thanksgiving*.

BENEDICTION/SENDING FORTH: The final blessing. At the end of the service, the pastor will issue a benediction in which he/she will pray for the congregation, encourage them, and send them into the world to be witnesses for Christ!

Why Ritual?

You may wonder, “Why do we do so many of the same things week after week in church?” That’s a great question! Sometimes formal worship can seem ritualistic, boring, and even insincere. Shouldn’t we be able to worship God in whatever way we want to? Well, yes, we should be, and we are. We are free to worship God at any time, at any place, and with anyone we choose, as long as our worship is reverent (a step above respectful) to God.

Having said all that, there’s a lot to be said for ritual. Think about your family’s Thanksgiving dinner. Do you have some traditions that you stick to every year? What about ceremonies at school, like induction into the NJHS? Have you ever watched someone graduate from high school or college or been to a wedding? If so, you know that the ceremony had a lot of ritual in it. Lots of really important events are ritualistic. Rituals make things familiar and patterned, and they help carry on tradition. They allow the people involved to participate together and be unified in traditions of the past.

Remember, though, ***worship is active!*** While ritual is important to our services, and we need organization, we never want to be so organized and formal that we don’t leave room for God’s Holy Spirit to work. The Holy Spirit is all around us, so as we worship, we want to be open to it. We should feel free to express our hearts to God in any way that the Spirit leads us. Rather than doodling on the bulletin, writing notes to our friends, checking social media, daydreaming, or sleeping, we should sing the songs, listen to the words of the prayers, and take the minister’s message to heart! Doing these things shows our open heart and mind during worship and allows God’s Spirit to be at work.

Every church chooses to worship God differently. Some use an organ and a choir, and the people dress up; others use guitars and dancing, and the people wear jeans and flip flops. Likewise, every *person* chooses to worship God differently. We can think, stand, sit, kneel, pray, speak, sing – *anything* that expresses our hearts to God! God doesn’t care how we worship. All that matters is that we make worship about God and not about ourselves.

Yikes! That is tricky! How can we make sure we focus our attention on God in worship?

The United Methodist Church often has a moderately formal style of worship in its traditional services. In most Methodist churches there is an order of worship, and the pastors wear robes and use creeds and liturgy. In general, Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches are more formal, and Baptist, Pentecostal, and non-denominational churches are less formal.

Contemporary, or alternative, worship services have grown a lot in recent years, even in the Methodist church. First Methodist McKinney's Wellspring worship service is an example of a contemporary worship service. These services, though they can be in a traditional denomination like Methodist or Baptist, are very casual and different. There's usually a band that plays, and the people sing a lot of contemporary Christian songs that you might hear on the radio. In these services, there are not many formal prayers, and the minister doesn't wear a robe. Instead of using hymnals or having Bibles in the pews, the people often look up at a big screen for the words. On that same screen, movie clips and video presentations often play throughout the service to communicate God's message. Before a contemporary service, there's often food, music, and a lot of time to hang out with friends. Overall, it's a more laid back atmosphere.

Every Day, Individual Worship

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." ~ Romans 12:1-2

Do you notice that this Scripture does not say, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship on Sundays...”? God doesn’t say that we only worship on Sundays. (Sunday morning Christian worship didn’t even come about until centuries later.) We are supposed to give ourselves to God *every day* because God is great every day! God calls us to worship Him by being “holy and acceptable” in our every day lives instead of being wrapped up in all the things of the world. This means that we worship God by:

- Being nice to our parents and obeying them instead of getting mad at them all the time (Ephesians 6:2)
- Turning the other cheek when our friends gossip about us behind our back (Matthew 5:39-41)
- Not fighting back if someone wants to fight us (Matthew 5:39-41)
- Studying for tests instead of cheating on them (Proverbs 13:4)
- Using clean and encouraging language instead of cussing (Colossians 4:6)
- Thinking good thoughts instead of mean or inappropriate ones (Philippians 4:8-9)
- Being sexually pure (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- Loving others (1 John 4:19-21)
- Choosing good friends (1 Corinthians 15:33)
- Reading our Bible on days other than Sundays (2 Timothy 3:14-17)
- Praying on days other than Sundays (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Taking care of our body and treating it as a holy temple (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- Being joyful instead of “pouty” (Philippians 4:4)
- Can you find others in Scripture?

Take a look at your own life. In what ways can you make Sunday morning worship a priority? In what ways can you make worship a daily thing?

There are countless ways to worship! If we live by Scripture and honor God in every activity we perform, every word we say, and every thought we think, our lives will worship God!

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Visit another Christian worship service – Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, non-denominational, Pentecostal, etc. Take notes on what is similar and different about the service than what you’re used to in the Methodist Church.

LESSON 5

Sacred Stuff: The Sacraments

Next on our agenda is to learn about the sacraments. Most likely, you've heard the word "sacrament" in church, but you may not know what it means. And you may not know what the sacraments are in the Methodist Church. Have no fear, though! By the end of this lesson, you'll know a lot more about them and how they are important in your life as a Christian.

You can probably guess that a sacrament is something *sacred*, but beyond that, it is pretty mysterious. The word sacrament comes from "sacramentum," which means the combination of two different things. As a Christian, you can think of this as a covenant, or really important bond, between God and people. When we participate in the sacraments, we are uniting with God in a covenant relationship.

The sacraments, by nature, are mysterious because *God* is mysterious. In fact, they are so mysterious and sacred that only ordained ministers can give and bless the sacraments in the Methodist Church. Ordained ministers have been trained to honor and respect the sacredness of the sacraments. God is so huge, and we are so small... how can some ritual we perform in church suddenly put us in a relationship with Him? It's impossible to totally grasp how it works because sacraments are beyond human understanding. Still, even though we cannot fully understand why or how, we do know that we participate in the sacraments in order to be united with God and celebrate His great love for us.

What are the sacraments in the Methodist Church?

- Baptism
- Communion

Sacrament #1: Baptism

As this book has already mentioned, baptism involves water and symbolizes God's love for us. It is a sign of God's grace poured out into our lives (and onto our heads!) because of Christ's death on the cross. As sinful as we are, even at birth (Psalm 51:5), God cleanses us and makes us new through baptism!

Baptism tells us a lot about God and humanity. We can be baptized as a baby or later in life. Infant baptism shows us that God gives us love even before we can accept it. It tells us that God gives us grace, not because we're super cool or cute or because we've done anything special, but because we *need* it (Ex: Think about how a mother bird cares for her baby birds. She provides a nest because they need shelter, but the baby birds don't necessarily *know* they need shelter since they're so young.). Believers' baptism (ex: an adult professing faith in Christ and asking to be baptized and join the church) shows God's work in a slightly different way. What unites different understandings of baptism is the belief that God is the most important part of the sacrament. 1 Peter 2:10 says that "*Once you were no people, but now you are God's people.*" Basically, without Christ, we're all "lacking" and full of sin. Because of Christ though, we are made complete because God saved us and

set us apart for God's purposes. Baptism symbolizes this "shift." The water of baptism cleanses us, gives us new life, and brings us into God's holy Church!

Baptism also tells us a lot about the home and the Church. When a child is baptized, not only is God working in his or her life, but God is working in the parents' lives and the congregation too! The parents are giving their child to the care of the congregation. They take serious vows and are considered responsible for raising their child in Christian love. Likewise, the congregation is considered responsible for nurturing the child in Christian love. During baptism, God calls both the parents and the congregation to be shepherds over the child and raise him or her to know all about God and His love for the world in Christ.

The three ways we can be baptized:

- 1.) Sprinkling – a little bit of water sprinkled on the head
- 2.) Pouring – a little bit of water poured on the head
- 3.) Immersion – full-on dunk!!

**In every Christian baptism, the minister says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."*

Why use water?

- Water is a symbol of God's love and forgiveness (Matthew 3:11).
- The Holy Spirit moved over water at the beginning of Creation and brought forth life (Genesis 1:2).
- In the Old Testament, God led the Israelites out of slavery through water to freedom (Exodus 13,14).
- Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in water (Mark 1:9-10).

FYI:

Methodists only baptize a person once. The Methodist church (and some other Protestant denominations) believes that baptism is a "one-time deal" because God does it, and what God does never needs to be "re-done." Every once in a while, though, a person might want to be "re-baptized" because he or she did not remember their infant baptism or for other reasons. In this case, the person is not "re-baptized" by the Methodist church, but instead, he or she "remembers" their baptism by having water sprinkled on their head again.

Sacrament #2: Communion

Communion is also known as the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist (which means thanksgiving), and mass (in the Roman Catholic Church). It is the second sacrament in the United Methodist Church. Communion is important for several reasons.

It is our way of remembering.

On the night Jesus was arrested before his crucifixion, he had the Last Supper with his disciples. Back then, the Jews celebrated a time called "Passover" together by eating a meal and worshipping God together. They did this every year to remember how God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and into freedom (long story... read the book of Exodus!).

Jesus wanted to eat with his disciples one last time because he wanted them to remember him. He gave them bread, which symbolized his broken body, and wine, which symbolized his shed blood. Jesus wanted his disciples to remember his life and ministry on earth and his death that would save them. As we take communion today, we too are called to remember. We must remember that had Jesus not died on the cross for us, we would not be able to live in eternity with God.

It is our way of celebrating.

Thankfully, Jesus' story did not end at his death! Easter is a happy day because we remember that God raised Christ from the dead. Because of the resurrection, we can experience joy and hope today, as well as look forward to eternal life with God! Communion is a meal we eat to celebrate God's amazing love and mercy.

It is our way to be in community or fellowship.

We've already mentioned that mealtime is hugely important in the Christian life. Communion is a special meal we eat with our Christian brothers and sisters. It's like eating turkey on Thanksgiving with our moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, dogs, etc. We gather together and enjoy the bond of Christ. As many of us as there may be, we eat the same bread and drink the same wine (well, actually, we Methodists drink grape juice!) and are one in Christ!

It is our way to be in God's presence.

The Bible tells us that God freely gives His spirit to all believers in Christ (John 14:15-17, 25-27). We experience the presence of the Holy Spirit during communion. The Holy Spirit gives us peace in the midst of our crazy lives, and it empowers us to continue living for God. Communion can be our "gas station." When we're feeling empty, God's sacred meal can fill us and remind us of our place and purpose in God's world.

What else do I need to know about communion?

Not every church does it the same. At First Methodist McKinney, we take communion by *intinction*, which means we all receive a piece of bread and dip it in the same cup of grape juice. In other churches, people eat small wafers or pieces of bread from a basket and drink grape juice from individual little cups. In the Roman Catholic Church, the people receive the bread, and the drink from the same cup. Some denominations serve wine instead of grape juice. It all depends on the traditions of the particular church. However the church serves it, though, communion is a sacred meal. It should be taken seriously and reverently because Jesus' death was serious and reverent.

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Find out how many sacraments are in the Catholic Church and name them in the space below.

LESSON 6

Scripture: God's Letter to Us

**Sneak a peek at the timelines and a list of all 66 books in the Bible at the end of this lesson.*

"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." ~ 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NRSV



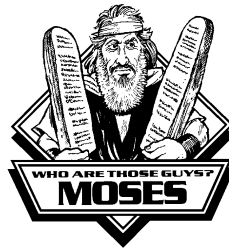
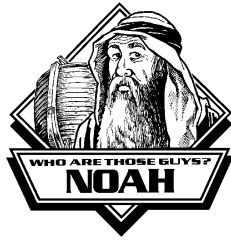
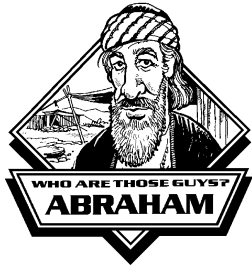
This lesson is one of the most exciting because we get to talk about the Bible, God's Word. One of the best ways to think of the Bible is as God's letter to us. It is God talking to us on paper, telling us about His great love, and giving us direction in our Christian walk and every day lives. (Lots of people also call the Bible our "roadmap" through life.) The Bible, or commonly called "Scripture," was written over a period of time of more than one thousand years, and it is made up of 66 books – 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek but has gotten translated into many other languages over time.

The writers of Scripture never intended for their words to be read like those in other books. What they wrote wasn't supposed to just entertain people or state history. They had experienced God in real and powerful ways, so they wanted to write their experiences for others to read. They wanted their stories to be real in the lives of others so that God could be known by all. God inspired their writing so that when we read each book, we learn the truth about God and His presence in the world.

Because every person who wrote part of the Bible had different experiences with God, each story is different. We can see lots of different sides of God when we read the Bible. This may make God seem confusing, but don't let it discourage you! There is one clear message throughout the Bible that should ease your mind: *the relationship between God and God's people (us!) is a covenant.* *Covenant* can mean "promise" or "bond." Throughout Scripture, God pursues a complete and wonderful relationship with His children – those of the past and us today. God loves us, has a plan for our lives, and promises to always be with us.

The Bible is a story of a special people, God's people. It is split into the Old Testament and the New Testament. "Old Testament" means "old covenant." In Leviticus 26:12, God spoke to the

Israelites and said, “I will be your God and you shall be my people.” From the beginning, God wanted to be in charge, take care of His children, and be in a relationship with them.



The people above were some of the earliest Hebrew people who were in a covenant relationship with God. What do you know about them?

Unfortunately, lots of people in the Old Testament didn't want to stick to this covenant relationship with God. They wanted to go off and do their own thing, ignoring God. Some of them even wanted to worship other gods than God. Can you believe some people worshipped a *golden calf*?! The Old Testament tells lots of stories about people letting sin get the best of them and breaking God's covenant relationship with them. They were sexually impure and rebellious, got drunk, fought with their friends, and did all kinds of bad things. The people were very unfaithful, and the world was very broken. Thankfully, though, the story doesn't end there!

“New Testament” means “new covenant.” It tells the second part of the story - God's faithfulness to His covenant through Jesus Christ. Jesus made an agreement with his followers at the Last Supper before he was crucified: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). If they believed that he was the Son of God sent by God, they would live with him forever and be restored to a complete relationship with God on earth.

One of the most important things you can learn in Confirmation is this: The Bible's stories are NOT just stories of the past. We experience brokenness and sin just like the people of the Old and New Testaments did. How many times have we fought with our parents or our friends? How often do we say things we shouldn't? What about our thoughts? Are they always what we should be thinking? Hopefully you see the pattern. We're not exactly perfect people! And that's not even mentioning all of the violence, hatred, and sin in our schools, cities, and around the globe. We live in a very broken world. In fact, it's so broken, it's sometimes hard to see God in it. There's hope, though! Instead of being a part of all the yuckiness of the world, we can choose to live in the light of God's Word. We can accept Christ as our Lord, be forgiven of our sins, and enjoy a new and complete relationship with God. The Bible is our way to “grow in grace.” All of its teachings remind us of God's covenant of love with us and challenge us to keep walking with Jesus in our daily lives.

Now, let's look a little more closely at both the Old and New Testaments. How were they written, and why were they written that way? How are they the same, and how are they different? What do they tell us about God and about ourselves? We'll start with the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT:

The Old Testament was written as many things - a history book, a bunch of stories and family trees/genealogies, even a collection of *poetry*! Without a doubt, it's one of the most interesting and complex things you'll ever read. Check out all of the different aspects of the Old Testament and then pick your favorite!

The Old Testament is full of history!

Lots of people think the Old Testament is really boring because there's a bunch of history in it. For example, it tells about Abraham and Sarah, the slavery of the Hebrews under Pharaoh, war battles, and more. Some of these stories might seem a little long, but they're actually very interesting and important because they tell us a lot about God and how He worked in the world and in the lives of His people a long time ago. For example, if it wasn't for Abraham and Sarah, we wouldn't see how faithful God was. If we didn't know the story of all of the battles fought, we wouldn't know how God fought for good over evil back in the old days. See? All the stories of history in the Bible show us that God has been involved in the world for as long as anyone can remember! (And even longer than that, actually!) To read a little bit of the Bible's history, check out [Joshua 1-6](#) or [1 Kings 1-6](#).

The Old Testament gave us the first Law.

As we've learned, the Old Testament told of God's covenant with God's people (remember, these people were the Hebrews or Israelites). God created the first laws to give God's people order and make sure they obeyed God and lived rightly. If the people didn't do what they were supposed to, they had separated themselves from God and broken the covenant. The first five books of the Old Testament are called "The Law," or the Torah ("Torah" is the Hebrew word for law), and they outline just about all the rules that the people were supposed to follow at the time. The Ten Commandments are included in the Torah. All of these laws are important to us today because they tell us everything God expected from God's people way back then and a lot of what God expects from us today. Look in the books of [Exodus](#) and [Leviticus](#) in the Bible. There are all kinds of crazy laws in there! (For example, did you know that God commanded God's people not to cook a young goat in its mother's milk?!)

In the Old Testament, God inspired poetry!

Some of the most beautiful writing in the Old Testament is its poetry. Because poems use fancy language, pictures, and metaphors, they are able to communicate how awesome God is in really unique ways. A lot of the images don't need to be taken literally, but they still tell the truth about God and us. The Psalms praise God and talk about human's sinfulness in very real ways. Other poetry in the Old Testament tells stories of history, and still others foretell the future of the New

Testament. The Bible's poems show us God's beauty and describe God in ways regular words and stories cannot. *"The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth..."* (See [Psalm 50](#).) Wow – now that's good stuff!

The Old Testament told of what was to come.

Did you know that even before you read the New Testament, you can find out that Jesus is coming into the world? It's pretty weird to think that men in the Old Testament knew God so well that they knew what God would do in the years to come. A lot of the prophets of the Old Testament were not liked very much because they said stuff that was totally different than what the rulers, religious leaders, and rest of society thought. Still, they were bold in telling God's truth to the people, even if they got in trouble or became unpopular. Prophets were cool because they could interpret the times they were living in and also tell about future events. They were so "in tune" with God that they could tell others what God was like, what He thought, what God was planning to do, and what would happen to the people if they didn't have God in their lives. God gave the prophets the ability to understand God's thoughts and actually *communicate* these thoughts to the people! *"This is what the LORD says,"* the prophets say. Take a look at the book of [Isaiah](#).

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Remember, just as the Old Testament tells the story of the covenant between God and the Hebrew people, the New Testament tells the story of God's *new covenant* with *all* people through Jesus Christ. This new covenant is God's way of letting humankind back into a relationship with God, after all of the sin and brokenness that keeps us away. The New Testament can be divided into two major parts - the *gospels* and the *epistles*. There are other books to study as well, though. Let's look at these in more detail:

The gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

"Gospel" means "good news." The first three gospels – *Matthew, Mark, and Luke* – are called the *synoptic gospels* because they are similar in the way they talk about Jesus. They tell most of the same parables (or stories) about Jesus and keep a similar order. The gospel of *John* is a little different in the way it was written, how Jesus talks, and what order the stories are in. The gospels were written at different times, at different places, by different men and tell us a ton about Jesus and the "good news" he brought to the world! Glance through your Bible and note the differences and similarities in the different gospels. (FYI – any time you see red writing or font, Jesus is talking.)

The epistles

As we learned several lessons ago, “epistle” means “letter.” The epistles were very important in the early church because they helped shape the earliest Christian individuals and communities. Today, they continue to teach us how important it is to have Christ in our lives. Paul wrote a lot of the epistles, which is cool considering who Paul was before he became a Christian. His name was then Saul, and he was a mean man who persecuted Christians. One day, though, the Lord came to him and changed his heart (and his name!) completely! Paul is considered the first Christian missionary. After his conversion, he went all over the place to tell people about the love and power of Jesus Christ.

Paul went through all kinds of hard times for preaching the Good News of Christ – he was even put in prison! During all of his struggles, though, Paul stayed faithful to God. And because he had a ton of life experience, Paul had a ton of advice to give! His letters to different churches encouraged the people, challenged them, and blessed them. He began most of his letters with a loving greeting and finished them with a benediction. Want to read one of these cool letters for yourself? Read the book of 1 Corinthians!

Other books in the New Testament

Other books in the New Testament have different purposes. *Acts*, as we’ve learned, celebrates the birthday of the Church and shows how it spread. *James* tells us how important action is in our faith. The last book in the Bible, *Revelation*, talks about the end times – what it will be like when Christ comes to earth again. Every book in the New Testament serves as a great guide to Christian living. Whenever we’re facing any kind of problem or need some direction, we can read a gospel, a letter, or any other book in the New Testament to get God’s perspective on what we’re going through!

Keep in mind that even though all the books of the Protestant Bible are the same, there are different translations of Bibles. There are also paraphrased versions. Translations mean that the Bible has been directly interpreted from the original Greek and Hebrew texts into another language. Paraphrased versions of the Bible have been rewritten in simple and sometimes incomplete terms. All Scripture, though, is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Greek word for *inspired* means “God breathed,” so we can also say that all Scripture is “God breathed.” It is straight from God to us.

What does “God breathed” mean to you? How do God’s words in Scripture speak to you?

Check out the different translations and versions of Scripture below! Did you have any idea how many different ways people could write the 23rd Psalm?!

KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION (RSV)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;
For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV **the official translation of the United Methodist Church*)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
For you are with me; your rod and your staff... they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE (Version)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall want nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, and leads me beside the waters of peace; he renews life within me, and for his name's sake guides me in the right path.

Even though I walk through a valley dark as death,

I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy crook are my comfort.

Thou spreadest a table for me in the sight of my enemies; thou hast richly bathed my head with oil, and my cup runs over.

Goodness and love unfailing, these will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE (Translation)

The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff—they protect me. You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!

Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the LORD's house as long as I live.

THE LIVING BIBLE (Paraphrase)

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!

He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He restores my failing health. He helps me do what honors him the most.

Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.

You provide delicious food for me in the presence of my enemies.

You have welcomed me as your guest; blessings overflow!

Your goodness and unfailing kindness shall be with me all of my life, and afterwards I will live with you forever in your home.

AWESOME!! This Bible stuff is making me curious! What else would be good to know?

Remember John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist Church? He said that of all the things that are important in the Christian faith, Scripture is the most important. He believed it was “a must” for living the Christian life! It might be easy for us to “know” that, but do we *believe* it? More than likely, we all have different attitudes about the Bible and its importance in our lives. What about you? When you think about the words of the Bible, what did you think? (Keep in mind there are no “right” or “wrong” answers here!)

- a) "Hmm... cool that God did that for those people then."
- b) "Hmm... cool that God can do those things in my life today!"
- c) "Bible? Nah, I'm not really into it these days. I can always read my Bible later and do other things like pray and hang out with my Christian friends now."
- d) "Bible? Yeah, no time for that. I've got dance, and band, and church, and homework, and family, and..."
- e) "Bible? Only dorks read the Bible!"
- f) "Oooh! This lesson has gotten me excited! I'd like to read the Bible more and get to experience God in my life today!"
- g) "Bible? Yeah, it's cool. But you don't have to read the Bible to be a Christian, so I think I'll just go with what I know."

However you think about the Bible, the truth is this: We can't live our lives as Christians the way God intended us to without reading the Bible. There's no other way that we can know God's perspective and how God wants us to live than reading God's very words to us. Besides that, as much as we'd like to pretend we know about God by what we feel, our feelings are not enough. We need to read God's Word in order to really get to know God for who God is and what God has done over time. Think about your friends. Do you know them only by what you've heard about them through other people, or have you actually spent time with them? The same is true with God. We get to know God by spending time with God. And we spend time with God by reading God's Word.



The Bible is powerful as it changes our lives day by day! Lots of times we don't give the Bible enough credit. Instead of seeing it as God's words to us today, we think it's just old, boring, and not relevant to our lives. Or sometimes we just think of the Bible as a magic wand! There are a lot of misconceptions about what the Bible is. Check out some of these "Bogus Bible Claims" below.

Bogus Bible Claims:

- The Bible gives immediate answers to life's problems.
- The Bible is a good luck charm to stay out of trouble and hard times.
- The Bible lists the boring rules to follow so we can get to heaven or be a "good person."
- The Bible is something we read to look cool in front of other Christians in the church.
- The Bible is what we read to "feel better" all the time.

If you're guilty of "believing the bogus," don't be discouraged! Understanding the Bible takes time, and God is patient. But now that you know what the Bible is *not*, read all the things that the Bible *is*, and get excited about growing in God's Word!

The Bible...

- shows us how God worked in the lives of people long ago and how God works in our lives today.
- tells us God's plans and purposes for the world and for our lives
- tells us the story of Jesus.
- brings us into and carries us through a relationship with Christ.
- teaches us about God – what God is like, what kinds of things God does, what makes God happy and sad, etc.
- teaches us how to be better followers of Christ – how to make the right decisions, love our friends and enemies, honor God, etc.
- shows us God's perspective.
- helps us fight the bad stuff in the world and hold on to the good.
- gives us peace when life is crazy.
- lets us feel God's presence.
- comforts us.
- helps us praise God.
- cheers us on.
- shows us God's great love and faithfulness.

THE CHALLENGE...

Now, let's get real. Some of you may be thinking, "Yeah, the Bible is cool, and I know I should read it..." but you pretty much know that you're not actually *going* to read it. Well, that's understandable because as we've talked about, there's a lot to read in the Bible. Not only are there a lot of pages in it, but there's some serious stuff covered. You may think the easiest way to get around Bible reading is just to go with what you've learned from these pages in the Confirmation book. Sneaky... 😊 But not smart. 😞 The truth is, none of the stuff you've been learning about Scripture will do you much good if you don't actually read the Bible. You may think you know what Scripture can do for you, but you'll have no idea until you actually read the Bible for yourself. God will really speak to you! Now, reading the Bible on your own may seem like an impossible task, but it's really not. Here are some helpful hints on how to do get started reading your Bible:

- 1) Set aside some time for Bible reading.
- 2) Go ahead and make the assumption that God is with you while you're reading (He is!).
- 3) Don't necessarily start at Genesis and try to read through to Revelation... you probably won't make it.
- 4) Pray before reading. Ask God to open your heart and mind to God's words in Scripture. Ask God to teach you more about God and about you as you read.

- 5) Pick a book and start at the beginning of the book. Start with some of the shorter books such as *The Gospel of Mark* or *James*.
- 6) Open the book and read the chapter or Bible story you have chosen out loud. Read it from several translations. Underline or highlight words/sentences and write down questions and insights that jump out at you.
- 7) After you have read the passage, ask the following questions:
 - a. What did I learn about God from this passage?
 - b. What did I learn about humans from this passage?
 - c. What does this passage tell me about my personal relationship with Christ?
 - d. How does this passage call me to grow in my faith?
 - e. How does this passage comfort, help, or heal me?
- 8) If you don't feel like you've learned anything, don't get discouraged. Be honest with God and pray to God. Say something like, "God, I have no idea what you mean by this passage. I'm frustrated. Please open my mind and my heart to you and help me understand what in the heck you're saying here." Then, close your Bible and try again tomorrow!

Now, try it! Look up the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 or Psalm 51 about sin and use the above study hints. Hopefully you'll enjoy learning more about God and your faith as you read God's words to you!

And don't ever, ever forget... as you read your Bible, God is with you! When you read every word, believe God is surrounding you. *God will speak to you*, showing you God's love and teaching you how to follow God.

*FAST FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE:

- United Methodists call the 66 books of the Bible Holy Scripture.
- The stories of the Bible are canonical. This means they contain God's Word in a way that sets them apart from other writings. Because the Bible has been canonized, we can accept it as God's Holy Word, and we can use it as a guide to live for godly living.
- The New Testament was canonized in 400 AD.
- Most of the ancient people did not read or write. In order to tell the stories in the Old Testament, people would memorize them and tell them over and over again. This is how the stories were passed down from generation to generation, and it is called the Old Testament's Oral Stage.
- The Torah, or first five books of the Old Testament, is also called the Pentateuch. "Penta" means five. The Torah is the main text that Jewish people still use for guidance today.
- During the Reformation, led by Martin Luther, the Bible was translated into many different languages.
- 1311 AD – The first Bible in English was completed.
- Today, the Bible is translated into over 1000 languages and many versions.

* Go The Extra Mile!

Memorize all 66 books of the Bible below.

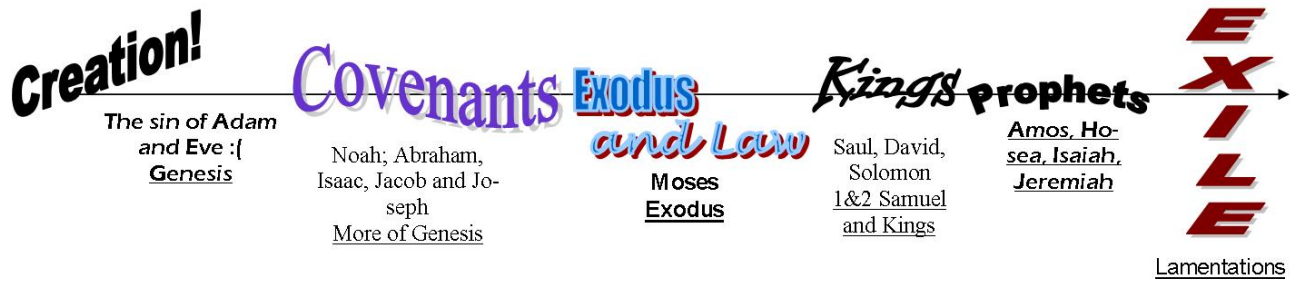
OLD TESTAMENT:

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Ester
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkak
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

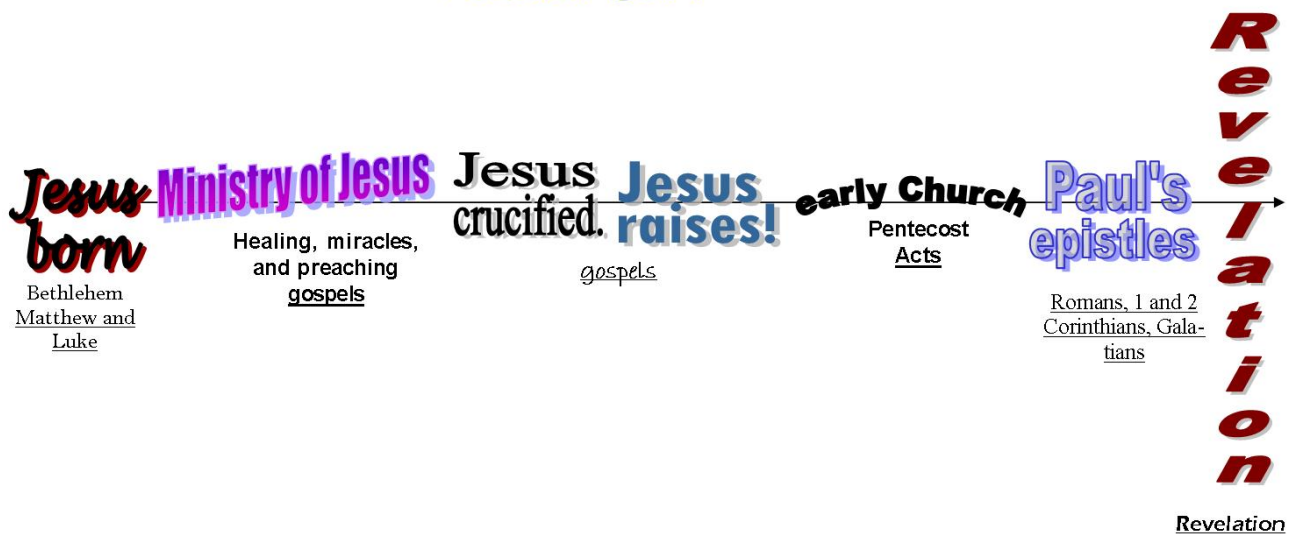
NEW TESTAMENT:

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Revelation

Old Testament Timeline



New Testament Timeline



LESSON 7

Communicating with God: Prayer

As we've learned, one of the most important things we can do as Christians is get to know God as much as we can. Only by getting to know God can we discover God's love and seek God's plans for our lives and for the world. And only then will we know how to follow God! There are lots of different ways we can get to know God – through our church, our families, our friends, our ministers, etc. There are two ways, though, that we hear from God directly. We've already talked about one of them – reading the Bible. The Bible is God's Word straight to us, so we can trust it to guide our lives. The other way we can hear from God directly is through prayer. Prayer lets us communicate with God any time we want to and ask God to guide us and help us in our every day lives.

Remember what we learned in the last lesson? We thought about our friends and how we know them. We don't rely on other people to tell us about them. We communicate with them directly. In the same way, we find out about God by God's Word to us, not just by what others say about God or even how we feel about God. When we pray, we are also finding out about God. We are getting to know God by talking and listening to God.

Who can pray?

What pictures do you associate with prayer? Do you picture a nun with her head bowed? Do you see a monk? What about a pastor? Lots of people think that only super "religious" people can pray. They think that you have to be a minister, a chaplain, or one of the most active teenagers in Student Life to lead a group in prayer because only they have the "right words."

Think about your times at church or Youth group. Have you ever heard your leader ask for volunteers to pray? Have you ever felt you were a bad "pray-er" or that only one of the leaders should pray? A lot of us are uncomfortable praying because we see it only as a "religious" thing, and well - sometimes we just don't feel very "religious!" Other times we feel like our faith and prayer time is "private;" we don't think there's any need to share it with others.

God never said we have to be a certain kind of person to pray. God would never create all of us and then only want to talk to a few of us, would He? There's no fancy language, age requirement, or "spiritual level" needed to talk to God in prayer. *Anyone* can pray to God!

Why do we pray?

"Religious" or not, God wants us to pray to God. To God, prayer is not about being religious - it's about being in a relationship. God simply wants to communicate with YOU! God wants to spend time with YOU! Think about Creation... do you think God would've created you and then just wanted to leave you alone? No way! God created us to be in a loving relationship with God and with each other.

Lots of people in the Bible were praying men and women. Isaac prayed (Genesis 24:63). Jehoshaphat prayed (2 Chronicles 20:3). Hannah prayed (1 Samuel 1:9-20). Jesus prayed (Mark 1:35). All these men and women knew it was important to pray if they wanted to be in a relationship with God, their Creator.

When do we pray?

Sometimes when we think of ourselves praying, we see ourselves in our beds struggling to keep our eyes open. It's the end of a long day, and all we want to do is go to sleep. We begin our prayers, and say things like, "God thank you for..." and our eyes close. Then we pop them open and try to stay awake. We try to continue saying, "Please God, help me to..." and our eyes close again. Our third try might go like, "Lord, please bless..." Finally, we drift off to sleep, and the next morning we wonder if we ever finished our prayers!

If this is you, don't worry - this is a lot Christians! The good news is that it's OK to fall asleep in the middle of prayers. (God is probably happy you chose God as the last person you talk to that day!) The other good news is that there are other ways to pray – even *better* ways to pray – if before bedtime doesn't work for you. We can pray as we eat our breakfast or in the middle of our morning shower. If we're still too sleepy, though, we can pray throughout the day. Every time the bell rings at school, we can pray for someone we love. Every time we go to our locker, we can thank God for something. Every time someone makes us mad, we can ask God to help us love that person. Every time we get jealous of someone else, we can talk to God about how we're feeling. Any time we're really giddy, we can tell God how happy we are! Get the picture? There's no "right" time to pray. The best time is probably a time when you feel awake, alert, and ready to talk and listen to God, but you can pray to God *anytime*!

Check out what the Bible has to say about prayer:

- *"Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord."* James 5:13-16
- *"...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God."* Philippians 4:6
- *"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication."* Ephesians 6:18
- *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing..."* 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Hopefully you get the point. We can pray anytime! Remember, what God wants is to be in a *relationship* with us, which means God wants to communicate with us. Go to God when you're happy, sad, frustrated, goofy, mad, sick, tired... *anything*!

What happens when I pray?

James 5:15-16 says this:

“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” The Gospel of Matthew says, *“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened,”* (Matthew 7:7,8).

God tells us very clearly that when we pray, God is listening! Big things happen when we go to God in prayer. People with cancer are suddenly healed. Our bad attitude towards school changes. Our hatred towards our enemies disappears. God tells us that the prayer of a righteous man (or woman!) is “powerful and effective.” When we have faith, lives are changed as we give them to God in prayer!

What if God doesn’t answer our prayers?

That’s a great question because more than likely, you’ve felt like God has not answered one or more of your prayers. Remember the Scripture above from Matthew? (“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find...”) Think about this: If God doesn’t answer your prayer, “Keep on asking... keep on searching...” God is happy when we continue to put our requests and needs in front of God. It shows God every day that we trust God with every detail of our lives, and it gives those details to God on a daily basis. If your answer still doesn’t come, ask yourself how God could have answered your prayer in a different way. Then consider how God, in all of God’s goodness, could make a huge blessing out of God’s different answer to your prayer!

What are the different ways to pray?

Prayer is talking. This means we just tell God all that’s on our hearts and minds. Why not?! God already knows it anyway! Talking to God is better than sharing things with even your closest friend. God is always available and 100% attentive. God listens to everything we have to say and receives us in love. Here is a good formula for talking in prayer... the acronym **ACTS.**:

A – Adoration (telling God how cool He is)

C – Confession (telling God what you’ve done wrong and that you’re sorry)

T – Thanksgiving (thanking God for all the blessings you have in your life)

S – Supplication (telling God what you need and want for yourself and for others)

Sometimes words can’t express exactly what we are thinking. During these times, it is good to look to the Bible for help. The Psalms help us express our love, fear, devotion, anger, joy, sadness, guilt, thanksgiving, and other stuff to God (basically, they tell God how we’re feeling in the midst of life.). Some great Psalms that you can pray are:

To give God thanks: Psalm 40: 1-5, 95: 1-7; 105: 1-6; 23; 92; 98; 150

To ask God to be close: Psalm 42; 141

If you need forgiveness: Psalm 32; 51

In time of fear: Psalm 27; 23; 46

If we're *really* stuck, we can look to words like those in Romans: *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God,"* (8:26,27). When life is stinky, and we can't even begin to explain how sad we are or how much we hate what's going on in our lives, we can just ask God to let God's Spirit speak for us. The Holy Spirit will actually pray *for us* so that God will know just how we're feeling! Cool, huh?

If you don't like any of these ways to pray, you can always start with the good ol' Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught his disciples. The Lord's Prayer is (you can also find it in Matthew 6:9-13):

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

Prayer is listening. This is a tough one because most of us would much rather talk than listen. Listening to God means that we stop whatever we are doing and concentrate on God around us. We can listen to God as we sit in silence. We can listen to God as we listen to the sounds of nature and God's creation around us. We can listen to God as we read Scripture and understand that God is speaking to us. We can listen to God when we listen to other people encourage us, give us advice, or set us back on the right path. Listening to God means we stop thinking about what we want to do or be, and we focus on what *God* wants.

Prayer is waiting. Waiting is never easy, but it reminds us that our lives are in God's hands, not ours. We can wait for God to answer our prayers, show God's love to us, meet our needs, the list goes on! However long the wait, it is worth it when we see God in an even bigger and better way than we did before!

Praying is saying, "Yes!" This means that when we pray to God, we are continuing on in our relationship with Christ. We are saying "yes" every day to our commitment to God. We are saying "yes" to growing, sharing, witnessing, loving, etc.

Remember that as we pray, we are limited by *nothing*! If our hearts and minds are open, God is there to do the rest! The Holy Spirit changes our lives each moment we pray and seek God. We don't have to be super "religious," and we don't have to have perfect bedtime prayers. God wants the little details of our lives. God wants our praise and thanksgiving. God wants our time – even if it is only 3 minutes every day. As you pray more and more as a Christian, you'll see that God *will* change your life, your perspective, and your attitude, and God *will* become your very best friend. Enjoy your time with God and know that God LOVES God's time with YOU!!

* Go The Extra Mile!

Find a psalm you like in the Bible and rewrite it in your own words OR commit to praying for 10 minutes every day this week.



LESSON 8

Living for Christ

Could ya? Should ya? Would ya ●

So, what does all this mean? We've now looked at the Church, the Methodist denomination, the Sacraments, the Trinity, worship, the Bible, and prayer. What do they all have in common, and how do they help us live our lives today?

Well, obviously, all these things have GOD in common! We learn about them in Confirmation so that we can see all the different things that make our faith what it is. What's important now is that we take all of these things and put them into ACTION. That means we take our belief in God and our trust in Christ and let it affect every area of lives! Have no fear, though – it is a great and wonderful thing to live for God and let others see Christ in you!

James 2:14 says, *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?”* Basically, this verse is saying that all the faith in the world won't do you any good if you don't *do* anything about it. In the same way, all that we've learned in Confirmation will do us no good if we don't do anything about it. If we *believe* in Christ, but we don't *live* in Christ, we're missing out! Let's learn how we can live in a way that glorifies God and gives Jesus a good name!

You are what you do.

When all is said and done, people look at Christians to decide whether or not they want to be a Christian too. That means others are watching what we do and say and judging the Christian faith based on what they see! We have a huge responsibility then to make the right choices in our lives and do things that please God. Let's look at how we can make the right choices as a Christian. John Wesley had some good advice! He said these four things are important when we make choices in our lives:

- **Scripture**
- **Tradition**
- **Experience**
- **Reason**

SCRIPTURE:

Of all four, Scripture is the most important, according to John Wesley and the Christian faith. All of the other three help us understand and apply Scripture to our lives. Like we've learned, Scripture shows us God's perspective on what we're going through. If we think, "Ugh... my best friend betrayed me and gossips about me. It's impossible to forgive her," the Bible says, "nothing will be impossible with God," (Luke 1:37). If we think, "My family is falling apart. I am so sad," God's Word says, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds," (Psalm 147:3).

Scripture isn't a rule book. It tells us about who God is, who we are, and who we are supposed to become. The Bible may not give you specific answers right away, but it will show you what direction to go and even how to think about what you're going through. We can look at the stories in the Bible and see how people of faith responded to their joys or problems, and we can be encouraged to stay faithful.

TRADITION:

We have traditions in our families, in our churches, and sometimes even in our friendships. When we live for God, it's important to keep these traditions in mind. For example: It is a traditional Methodist belief that we are to always show *love*. When we see someone in our school who might be lonely and need a friend, then, what should we do? Show love!! The Church reminds us of our traditional beliefs and encourages us to make good decisions as Christians.

Creeds are an important part of our church traditions (you'll learn more about creeds in the next lesson). The first people of our church who wrote our creeds thought a lot about their faith. They read, they studied, they even *fought* for what they believed! We can trust what decisions they made and learn from them because these people sought God in all they did and relied on God's Holy Spirit to guide them. It's important that we value what they contributed to the Christian Church. For example, we should honor the rituals and sometimes boring stuff in church because it came from some really important people in the past. It is all part of the tradition that God blesses.

EXPERIENCE:

Think about your experiences in life. How have your actions in the past affected what's going on in your life now? Can you think of mistakes you've made in the past that had bad consequences? If so, those consequences probably (hopefully!) remind you not to make that mistake again! In the same way, can you think of good things you've done in the past? How have those decisions been blessings in your life?

When we live our lives for Christ, it's important that we pay attention to the things going on around us. God often uses the circumstances in our lives to show us God's way and to guide us through life. For example...

- If we want to have wonderful, loving Christian friends, but we have one friend who is mean and treats us badly, God might be telling us to seek out new friends or reach out and help the friend we don't like.

- If we really want to pray more, but we're super busy, God might be calling us to slow down and spend time with God.
- If we need an A in our history class, but we keep getting Cs on our papers, we know we need to work harder and study more.

We can also know God through experience when we look at and listen to those around us. Other people can show us God's plans for our lives.

- If God tells us in the Bible that we are supposed to honor our parents, and our parents keep telling us we are hurting their feelings, we can assume that we're not doing what we're supposed to do!
- If our life is stinky, a friend can tell us over and over again that God really *does* love us, even if it doesn't feel like God does. This is encouraging!
- If we're worried about a test coming up, a friend or tutor can help us study and do well.

See God at work? A friend can be God's way of helping us! Other people can tell us their experiences with God, challenge us to grow, or tell us when we're making a good or bad decision. And our Christian friends know God and make good choices for Christ, so they can help *us* to know God and make good choices for Christ. Pretty cool, huh?

**What's going on in my life right now? Who are the people who surround me?
What could God be telling me through these people and experiences?**

REASON:

Use your mind! Your head is as important as your heart when it comes to making decisions for Christ, so think through your decisions carefully.

- Consider all the different sides of what you're going through.
- Think of the consequences of all you do.
- Remember that God is seen in your actions and behavior.
- Ask for your friends' opinions.
- Pray for God's guidance! God will direct your steps every day if you ask.

It's easy to let every day decisions get the best of us. We think that the "little things" don't matter, but they do! **Every decision we make matters to God.** God loves us and wants the very best for us! Let's never forget that when we "claim the name 'Christian,'" people watch us and the things we do and say. We should do our best to honor God in *all* that we do because God is good, and God will bless our lives in huge ways as we live for Christ!

***Go The Extra Mile!**

Think of some decision you're facing right now. It might be something that has to be decided soon (like, "How am I going to treat that girl/guy I don't like tomorrow at school?"), or it might be a decision that will have to be made in the next year or two (like, "Should I be active in Youth Group at church?" ... **and by the way, the answer to that question is YES!!** 😊). Write down the question, and then spend a few minutes using Wesley's four guidelines to help you come closer to deciding what to do.

Decision to be made: _____

Scripture _____

Tradition _____

Experience _____

Reason _____

"Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more." ~1

Thessalonians 4:1

LESSON 9

Creeds, Doctrines, Symbols, and Seasons

Creed and Doctrines

Before your Confirmation, find some time to better understand some creeds and doctrines of the church. That way, you will know why we say some of the things we say and do some of the things we do in the church. We're going to look at some Christian creeds, doctrines, symbols, and seasons. To really get it all, though, we have to hop back into history (think Lessons 1 and 2) and think about the early church.

If you remember, back in the day, Christians were going through all kinds of hard times as they grew in their churches. They were being persecuted by the Romans and attacked for their beliefs. In addition to all of this, various false teachings, or heresies, were all around. People were starting to believe all kinds of wrong things about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit! This was really dangerous because wrong thinking was starting to shape the Church!

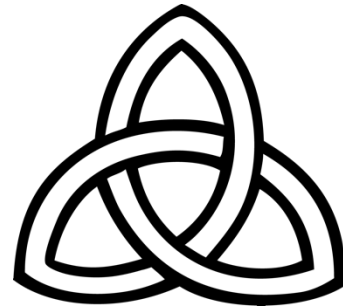
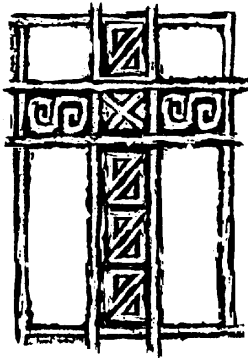
There was so much chaos going on that the Christians quickly realized they needed some order and guidelines in their faith. It was important for them to be able to state exactly what they believed so that their faith and beliefs would not be compromised or misunderstood. Church leaders got together to form Councils and wrote down the basic Christian beliefs based on what they had read in Scripture. The result is what we know as creeds, or *statements of belief*. The most well known creed is the Apostles' Creed. Weird, but it was not actually written by the apostles. It was written about 500 years after the time of Jesus. You've probably heard or said *The Apostles' Creed* before. It is:

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen*

See? That pretty much tells the basics of what we believe as Christians – simple and clear. The Apostles’ Creed is probably the most traditional and well-known of the creeds. There are more modern creeds than the Apostles’ Creed, though. An example is below:

We believe in God, whom we call by many names and experience in countless ways. God calls us into being, guides, and protects us, judges us, forgives us, loves us, nurtures us. We believe in Jesus Christ, from who we receive true freedom: freedom from fear and loneliness and freedom for love and self-giving. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the power of God reaching out to renew and refresh us; to teach and guide us. We believe in the church and its ministry, the continuing incarnation of God’s love on earth. We believe that we are a people called by God to works of justice and mercy, and we pledge to become the people God has called us to be.

Notice that these creeds both state belief in the same things – God the Creator, Jesus who died and rose again, the Holy Spirit who lives within us (the Trinity!), the Church, and eternal life. The words are different, but the meanings are the same. This goes for all Christian creeds. They all say the same things, just in different words. Want to see more creeds? Feel free to check them out in the United Methodist Hymnal, pages 880-882!



Symbols

Now, let’s shift gears and get into some of the symbols in the Christian Church. You’ll see these around churches on banners, bulletins, and/or stained glass windows, so let’s figure out what they mean! Keep in mind that a symbol is *an object or sign that stands for something else*. It can often be a physical representation of something we can’t see, like an idea. Symbols help remind us of things unseen (which is cool because *God* is unseen!). Some symbols that you see all the time are:

1. A red heart, representing love.
2. The American flag, representing the United States of America and freedom.
3. A wedding ring, representing the vows and commitment of marriage.

**Can you think of other symbols that are common in our lives?*

Symbols have been an important part of Christianity from the beginning. For example, the Bible often refers to Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” and “shepherd.” The Bible is full of visual symbols of the Church. Many of them are below!



What do you think of when you see a snake? Due to the stories in Genesis, the snake often stands for the *sinfulness of humans* or *evil*.

In Genesis 6-9, we read of the Flood and Noah’s Ark. The ark represents *salvation* since Noah and his family found safety from the flood there. Do you remember the dove that returned with the olive leaf to show that land was near? A dove with an olive branch is now the symbol of *peace*. A final symbol which comes from this story is the rainbow assures us of *God’s love and covenant with us*.



The Cross is the most common symbol of the Christian faith. Although we remember *Christ’s suffering* on the cross, Protestants leave the cross empty to symbolize *Christ’s resurrection*. There are more than fifty forms of the cross used in Christian art.

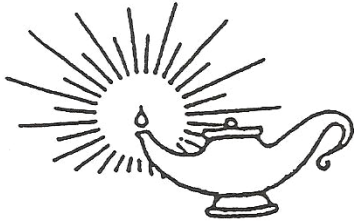
The IHS is a symbol derived from the 1st, 2nd, and last letters of the Greek word for *Jesus* (Ihsus). It is most often found on the center of the altar cross.



The XP (Chi Rho) comes from the two Greek letters for the name for *Christ* (Christos). This symbol is often found on the altar cloths, stoles worn by ministers, banners, or stained glass.

The descending dove is one of the best-known symbols for the *Holy Spirit* because of the gospel stories of Jesus’ baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. When we are baptized with water, we ask that the Holy Spirit might be active in our lives. The descending dove symbolizes that God comes to us and is with us always.





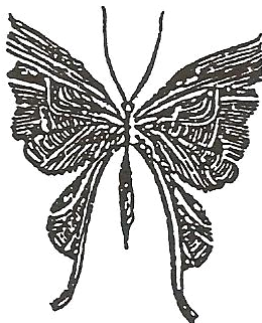
A burning lamp represents the *Bible*. A lamp helps us to see when it is dark. A lamp is a sign for study and learning. Christians believe that they learn about God when they study the Bible. It sheds light on our lives, and it can lead us, as light can. The lamp also refers to a quotation from Psalm 119:105.

During the Roman Empire, Christians were forced to meet in secret to protect themselves. The fish became a secret symbol for *Christianity*. When strangers met on the street, one might begin casually drawing half of a fish in the sand with his or her toe to show his faith. If the other person drew the other half of the fish, they both realized they were no longer strangers but friends in Christ! This symbol is rooted in the Bible when Jesus called his disciples to be "fishers of men."



Fire is a symbol for *what God does through the Holy Spirit*. Fire burns away impurities. It inspires us with awe. It gives power and causes us to be warm. In the second Chapter of Acts, the Bible states "...there appeared to them tongues of fires, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit . . ."

The bread and wine symbolize *Christ's body and blood*. They are visible ways through which Christ comes to us in our worship. As we celebrate communion with bread and wine/grape juice, we are remembering Jesus' last meal with his disciples, and his life, death, and resurrection.



The butterfly is a symbol for *resurrection*. This is because in an early state of growth, the butterfly grows in a smooth, hard shell which often rests on a leaf or branch. This is commonly known as a cocoon. The cocoon appears dead, but inside it, a butterfly is growing. In about two weeks, the butterfly breaks out of the cocoon, and flies away. What was thought to be dead is really alive, just as Jesus was dead but rose to new life!

The cross and flame are symbols of *the United Methodist Church*. The flame reminds us of John Wesley's faith, - "a heart strangely warmed" - and it represents the Holy Spirit. The cross reminds us of Christ, who loves us and calls us to serve in his name.





First United Methodist Church's logo helps us remember our connection to other Methodists around the world with its inclusion of the cross and flame. The heart reminds us to "share the heart of Christ from the heart of McKinney" which is our mission statement.

Seasons

Seasons are super important in our church because they remind us of the major stories in the Christian faith. Below are the seven Christian seasons and four liturgical colors.

Advent (purple): The four Sundays before Christmas. A time of preparation and expectation – we're getting ready for Jesus' birth! *Fun Fact: Purple is the color of royalty. Coincidence? We think not! ☺

Christmastide (white): Christmas Day and one or two Sundays afterward. A time of celebrating the gift of God's Son.

Epiphany (green): Four to nine Sundays between January 6 and the beginning of Lent. A time of remembering Christ's birth and the journey of the wise men.

Lent (purple): The 40 days leading up to Easter beginning on Ash Wednesday. A time of repentance and denial as we think about Jesus' suffering and death.

Eastertide (white): Easter Day and six Sundays afterward. A time of celebration of Christ's resurrection and the hope of new life!

Pentecost Season (red): Eleven to sixteen Sundays beginning with Pentecost Sunday. A time of celebrating the birthday of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Kingdomtide (green): Thirteen or fourteen Sundays ending with Advent. A time to consider the Kingdom of God.

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Design your own personal stained glass window using your favorite colors and symbols of Christian belief.

