**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

**Before using this service outline,
read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Learning and Caring**

The Methodist calling to ‘Learning and Caring’ contains three practices: learn, care and openness. While these are commitments we can practise and receive with all people, they particularly relate to how we connect and form community within the ‘community of believers’ – those who have committed to exploring a relationship with God. This does not just mean Methodist members, but may include people who attend groups run by the church, or friends and neighbours who are spiritually seeking but would not call themselves ‘Christians’. The commitments help us to support each other both practically and spiritually.

**Learn**

**“We learn more about our faith”**

**Key themes**

* Jesus calls us to be disciples, which is like being an apprentice. We need to learn, grow, change, and be surprised by God. We will never know all the answers, but seeking answers can itself be an important formation.
* For some people this might be formal theological education, but we also learn through our day-to-day lives and encounters with other people. ‘Learning’ is not all about facts, we also learn through hearing stories and understanding the emotional journey of others, or through ‘doing’.
* There are lots of things that can block learning. We might be over-nostalgic and sceptical of the unknown. Or get stuck in an ideology that limits curiosity. Or just get distracted.
* Be open-minded! We often learn most from people who are different/have different views from us.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Matthew 28:16-20; John 14:25-27; Philippians 4:8-9

**Background reflection**

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, always had a restless desire to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ, to grow and mature in the faith, and this is an example we should follow.

*The gospel for all*

In an age of social inequality, grinding poverty and great need, many people felt dehumanised, alienated and powerless. But everyone matters to God, which is why Wesley’s preaching touched the lives of thousands with a message of hope. Salvation is not dependent on social standing or moral virtue; it is a gift available freely to all.

This ‘all’ is what gives Methodists a passion for evangelism and inclusion, including people marginalised by society. If this is true, it should inform how our learning affects our practice.

*This would be a good time to ask a questions for discussion around the gospel for all.*

Learning is not just about facts. Faith is a physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional journey. Wesley emphasised that the Holy Spirit helps us to realise our need of God, come to discover him and then receive the assurance of his acceptance, love and forgiveness. This is not the end of our pilgrimage, but it is the end of our searching for the way.

*True religion is never solitary*

Beginning with Wesley, and throughout Methodist history, one key way that many people experienced and reflected on intense personal encounters of faith has been through the love and care of small groups of people meeting together. Many of John Wesley’s family were part of the new Methodist movement together. As his brother Charles put it in one of his hymns: “He bids us build each other up; and, gathered into one, to our high calling’s glorious hope we hand in hand go on.” (*StF* 608)

Many churches today still have mid-week small groups (or cell groups, home groups, or Welsey’s language “Classes and Bands”). In these gatherings, the results of evangelical preaching were consolidated, effective pastoral care took place and many were motivated to get involved in social and community action.

*Ask a discussion question about small groups.*

*Head, heart and hand*

Wesley described himself as a “man of one book” and no doubt that is a major reason for his effectiveness. Exploring and understanding the Bible (not just isolated verses but whole books) and reading or listening to ancient and modern commentators is an important way we develop our faith. Discussing it with others who might have different views to ours is even more valuable.

But intellectual learning is not the only way we learn, or how we grow in faith. A common idiom says that “changed hearts change minds”, yet post-modern Western communities often begin with the mind. We can learn through our actions – we learn how to care for others only by beginning to care for others, not reading a book about caring. We can learn by listening to the stories of other people, and understating their and our own emotional response. And we must leave room for doubt and questions.

People are searching for answers to complex life questions and, while learning can help us have confidence in sharing our faith, saying “I don’t know” can be an invaluable way of creating space for people to find their own answers. And, sometimes, we must find peace in never knowing all the answers.

**Further notes**

* This liberating message is often summarised: “All need to be saved. All may be saved. All may know themselves saved. All may be saved to the uttermost.”
* All need to be saved – salvation is rooted in what Christ has done for us to renew our relationship with God, and what the Spirit does in us to heal our hearts and transform our lives.
* All may be saved – the Spirit is already, and always, at work in our hearts.
* All may know themselves saved: we can feel the work of salvation. As in Romans 8:15-16, the spirit of adoption within us cries out “Abba! Father!” and brings us assurance of forgiveness.
* All may be saved to the uttermost – God finishes what he starts, he changes us from glory to glory into the likeness of Christ.
* Wesley spoke of the “means of grace”, such as worship, prayer, Bible study, fellowship and service, help us travel the way of holiness, the essence of which is perfect love for God and humanity. For Wesley, this stress on perfect love, which simply means Christ-like love, is paramount.
* In addition to continuing to attend Anglican services, Wesley established Societies (a group of men and women “having the form, and seeking the power, of Godliness; united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation”), Classes (groups of 12 people who met together to develop in, and deepen faith), and Bands (single-sex groups to deepen discipleship and faith through confession, accountability and prayer). Every Methodist was expected to belong to a Class where they were encouraged and challenged to grow in their faith. Many Christians find similar groups an important part of their learning and reflection.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Fix you – Coldplay

As dawn awakes another day (*StF* 659)

Come, learn of God’s kingdom (*MP* 1266)

Day by day, dear Lord (*StF* 444)

For all the saints who shared your love (*StF* 746)

May the mind of Christ my Saviour (*StF* 504)

Says Jesus, ‘Come and gather round’ (*StF* 510)

Teach me, my God and King (*StF* 668)

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart (*StF* 477)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* Take a look at the creation myths of some ancient cultures, such as the Babylonian Enuma Elish, one of the Egyptian Cosmogony stories, or the Greek stories of Gaia and the Titans and compare them to the account of Genesis 1. You could do this by watching short videos on YouTube explaining the myths or printing out short stories (either from original sources or modern adaptions for children or teenagers).

What differences do you see in the characters of the God of Genesis and the gods of the other myths? How does God’s/the gods relationship with humanity differ?

If you’re using videos, ask people to respond by drawing a representation of the gods’ character and their connection to humans. Reflect on what we learn about God’s love for creation, including humans, from this activity. *Warning: Some of these stories contain depicts of violence (including against children) and sexual acts. Please review materials before using them and consider whether they are appropriate for the audience.*
* In advance, ask the group to bring in one or two of their favourite resources for learning such as books, journals, a phone (to represent podcasts), a ticket to a Christian event, etc. Ask each person to share something they learnt from that source, and why they like learning that way.

**Discussion questions**

* Do you believe the gospel is for all? How is this part of your individual faith and/or your community? What would help you/us to live this out more fully? What are the barriers?
* If you have small groups – how do they help you to learn, grow and reflect? If you don’t, would this be a helpful thing?
* How could your learning be more inclusive of different points of view, life experiences, and expectations?
* How do you learn using your head, heart and hands?
* What has helped you learn and grow recently?
* What would you like to learn about faith?
* **What’s the best lesson you’ve ever learnt about God?**
* **Are there questions you struggle with? Where have you found peace in not knowing all the answers?**
* What can we learn from John Wesley’s life, particularly when it comes to practising a ‘way of life’?
* What might Classes and Bands look like in your community today?
* How might you grow in faith and support others in your community to grow in their faith?

**Prayer ideas**

Pray for open minds and hearts: Think of an issue you are struggling with, or someone who has a different point of view to yours. Ask God to give you peace in this tension.

Ask God to help you build community with people who are different to you, from whom you can learn and who can learn from you.

*Explore creative ways to pray with all ages, using the Methodist prayer cards, available as*[*a printed pack*](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGIPC22/intergenerational-prayer-cards)*for meetings and events,*[*a PowerPoint*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28465/intergenerationalprayercards-smaller.pptx)*for church services and meetings or*[*as a PDF*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28466/digital-prayer-cards-131222.pdf)*for digital use.*

**Ways to respond**

* Visit [methodist.org.uk/Learn](http://methodist.org.uk/learn)
* Visit [methodist.org.uk/NoticingGod](http://methodist.org.uk/noticinggod) to explore ways to reflect on how we notice God as we learn so that the experience is not simply ‘head’ but also ‘heart’ and ‘hands’.
* Find out more about [Classes and Bands](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/small-groups/#:~:text=John%20Wesley%20encouraged%20different%20kinds%20of%20small%20group,how%20each%20person%20was%20living%20the%20Christian%20life.), and how to [create ‘conversation spaces’](https://methodist.org.uk/conversationspaces) today.
* Explore a source of learning that is different to your usual one – eg listening to a podcast if you normally read a book. This could be a recommendation from someone else in your group.
* Explore a source of learning from someone in a different culture, or different life experience, to yours. Reflect on how these differences may have given them different insights to your own.
* Consider holding [Ask Me Anything](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/training-for-justice-dignity-and-solidarity/run-an-ask-me-anything-session-with-an-expert-by-experience/) sessions to learn from people with different life experiences in your community.