**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

**How to use these outlines**

This resource offers outlines for 13 worship services (whether Sunday or midweek, in a church building, cafe or forest) for each of the 12 commitments of A Methodist Way of Life (MWOL). It aims to challenge worshippers to consider what it means to be a Methodist in every moment of our lives, not just on a Sunday morning.

These are guidance notes only, recognising that you know your context and community best. Think of it as a ‘pick and mix’ assortment of options. We also strongly encourage you to give the outlines your own twist by adding personal stories and quotes from books you’ve read or podcasts you listen to. In places, there are suggestions for where such additions may fit well. But it is not intended as a definitive ‘order of service’ and you may wish to skip bits, move bits, or add bits. In fact, if you try to do everything, you will need several weeks for each session!

Similarly, the outlines do not have a set order, nor do they have to be used in a series. If you are doing the whole series, it might be helpful to start with a familiar commitment – something that allows you to celebrate what the community and its members are already doing. But don’t leave all the hard ones until the end! You could rotate through one commitment from each of the four areas of Our Calling, or look at each area in sequence.

These outlines work best when everyone in the church (or circuit) is working together. Rather than specifying the context for each section (eg this bit is for children, this bit is for small groups), the notes are ordered by activity, so that you can decide the best way to use them in your community. Below are some thoughts on how to use different parts of the outlines, depending on your role.

**Superintendents**: Consider running the whole series across the circuit on the same timeline, with preachers encouraged to use the same order, so that all churches experience all 12.

**Ministers**: Encourage co-ordination between preachers, worship leaders, children’s and youth workers, stewards, and small group leaders so that all groups/ages have the option to explore the same themes.

**Preachers**: As well as being part of a series, you can use individual service plans whenever the lectionary passages touch on the themes of one of the MWOL commitments. Contact stewards and worship leaders in advance and request they also use these notes. Utilise the discussion questions and creative activities in your sermons, as well as the sermon notes (see our webpage on [creating conversation spaces](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/conversation-spaces/) in services). Send the activities and discussion questions on to church stewards and worship leaders so they can be passed though the community for use in mid-week groups or pastoral visits.

**Worship leaders**: Get in touch with preachers in advance to see whether they are also using these notes. Consider the song and hymn suggestions, but don’t feel beholden to them.

**Small group leaders**: Pick up and develop the themes and the passages in these outlines using the discussion questions and interactive activities. Ask someone who attended the worship service to summarise the sermon or discussion for those who weren’t present, and as a reminder for those who were.

**Children, youth and family workers**: We believe that some young people are just as capable as adults at getting to grips with meaty topics, and some adults learn better through games and crafts than a sermon. Rather than creating a separate resource or section for young people, we’ve designed this resource to be accessible to all. Pick and choose the bits hat will help you. You know your young people best.

**Lay leaders**: Use these service outlines for local arrangements. While you can simply read out the reflection, we encourage you to break it up with your own stories, or with discussion questions or illustrations. Utilise the discussion questions, activities and sermon notes to organise story sharing and creative options in both traditional Sunday services and at informal or alternative experiences like Cafe or Breakfast Church, or anything else you run (see our webpage on [creating conversation spaces](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/conversation-spaces/)).

**Each outline includes:**

* Key themes – the main ideas to land, particularly for newcomers. Use these notes if you intend to write your own sermon or reflection.
* Background reflection – a reflection that you can read or use as a basis for your own talk. Some ideas for incorporating discussion questions or creative activities are also suggested.
* Further notes – further contextual information (particularly useful for local preachers and ministers) and resources for further exploration.
* Songs and hymns – including suggestions from *Singing the* *Faith* (*StF*)*, Songs of Fellowship* vols 5&6 (*SoF*), the 2014 edition of Mission Praise (*MP*), the [Singing the Faith Plus website](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/) (*StF*+) and secular music.
* Discussion questions – these can be integrated into an interactive sermon or used separately in a small group discussion. It’s good to give people in the congregation a chance to discuss their faith.
* Creative activities – fun, intergenerational activities to help make your services pop.
* Prayer ideas – some suggestions for different, creative, communal prayer times.
* Ways people can respond – a simple, non-threatening way for people to respond to the service individually or in groups.

*With grateful thanks to all those who helped contribute to this resource:*

* *Background reflection and further notes: drawing upon notes from* Proclaiming the Way *by Jill Baker, Peter Howdle, Judith Rossall, Anna Bland, Richard Teal, Jongi Zihle, Tim Baker, Sarah Hooks, Michaela Youngson, Faith Nyota, Calvin Samuel, Anne Browse, and additional content from Rachel Lampard, Hannah Fremont-Brown, Holly Adams, and Andy Fishburne*
* *Hymns: Laurence Wareing and the team at* Singing the Faith Plus
* *Secular music: Tom Hart, Youth President*
* *Other content by Abi Jarvis, Discipleship and Faith Formation Officer*

All Bible verses quoted are from the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSVA) Anglicised* version unless otherwise stated.

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read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Intro session: A Methodist Way of Life – discipleship**

**Key themes**

* God loves us unconditionally. Nothing we do can make God love us more, but our response to God can help reveal God’s love to us.
* The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.
* A Methodist Way of Life is a way of unpacking what this means in practice in our daily lives. Both Methodists and spiritual seekers can use it to tune into God and respond to God’s love.
* We are all learning; we do not have to practice each of these commitments all the time. We are called to practice them “as far as we are able, with God’s help”. We practice them both individually and together as a community of followers, supporting and challenging one another.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Genesis 1:26-31; John 3:16, 13:34-35, 15:16-17; Acts 1:8

**Background reflection**

We sometimes feel like we must do certain things, or live a certain way, to be a follower of Jesus. But nothing we do can make God love us more – God loves us unconditionally, no strings attached.

Because of our commitment to God, and with God’s help, we try to live our lives being like Jesus and doing as Jesus would do. This is at the heart of the calling of the Methodist Church — to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

A Methodist Way of Life (MWOL) is a way of thinking about what this might look like in our everyday lives. It includes 12 commitments, or practices, that explore the four areas of Our Calling: worship, evangelism, learning and caring, and service. Another way of expressing this, which is familiar to anyone who has attended 3Generate in recent years, is that MWOL provides ways we can ‘tune into God’ and respond to what we hear. All generations can explore MWOL together. Engaging in these practices and reflecting on our experiences does not earn God’s love, but can help us to realise how deeply we are loved by God.

*This may be a good time to include the activity or discussion questions about ‘home stations’.*

We are not superheroes who can do all these things at once. But we live out these commitments “as far as we are able, with God’s help”, knowing that no one is perfect. We practise them both individually and together as communities of followers, supporting and challenging one another.

These practices are not just relevant to Methodists. Almost all of these commitments could be made by people of other Christian traditions, other faiths, or no faith. But their practice may look a little different. Each can be a ’thin place’ or ‘means of grace’; a way we encounter God and are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Because God is at work in us all, so MWOL is open to all people, not just Methodist members.

*This may be a good time to think about how your community provides opportunities to engage with the 12 practices using the discussion questions or activities.*

**Further notes**

* A model for the discipleship journey can be found at [methodist.org.uk/Discipleship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/discipleship). This includes three stages, told in the parable of a train journey: committing to Jesus (get on the train), practising all 12 commitments (visit every station) and reflecting theologically and expectantly (reflect on the journey). You may find this helpful to explore in this session.
* Many discipleship resources discuss belief, practice, or both. A Methodist Way of Life is practice-based; it focuses on what we do. However, this does not negate belief. While all people can challenge injustice (for example), the Methodist understanding of how to practise this may be different to others because of a) belief in Jesus and b) interpretation of Scripture and tradition. You do not ‘become a Christian’ because you practise these 12 commitments, but through them you may encounter Jesus in new ways that lead to a Christian faith, or deepen existing faith.
* No individual or community can do everything at once, and it can help to think about one commitment from each area of Our Calling in a particular season. Examples of this are in the PowerPoint. When considering the community, it may be helpful to refer to your mission plans and/or vision statements.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

For once in my life – Stevie Wonder

The Glass – Foo Fighters

It’s a kind of magic – queen

Desire – Calvin Harris, Sam Smith

State of Grace – Taylor Swift

*The journeying of discipleship*

God who sets us on a journey (*StF*+)
O Lord we are always in your presence (*StF* 33)
One more step along the world I go (*StF* 476)

*God loves us unconditionally. Nothing we do can make God love us more, but our response to God can help reveal God’s love to us.*

O love that wilt not let me go (*StF* 636)
There’s a wideness in God’s mercy (*StF* 416)
Where shall my wondering soul begin? (*StF* 454)

*The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.*

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love (*StF* 249)
We’ll walk with you (God called you, Jesus, into Jordan's deep) (*StF+*)
When I survey the wondrous cross (*StF* 287)

*A Methodist Way of Life is a way of unpacking what this means in practice in our daily lives. Both Methodists and spiritual seekers can use it to tune into God and respond to God’s love.*

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go (*StF* 550)
From heaven you came, helpless babe (*StF* 272)
Listen, my people, here is my challenge (*StF+*)

 *We are all learning; we do not have to practice each of these commitments all the time. We are called to practice them “as far as we are able, with God’s help”. We practice them both individually and together as a community of followers, supporting and challenging one another.*

Just as I am, without one plea (*StF* 556)
Speak in the stillness, God we pray (*StF* 511)
Take this moment, sign, and space (*StF* 513)

**Creative activities**

* Explore the ‘home stations’ of your community – the commitments they most value, or practices through which they most easily tune into God. There are some activities to help you do this on the [MWOL](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discipleship-pathways-travelling-together/being-a-discipleship-leader/exploring-a-methodist-way-of-life-as-a-church/) resources page. If you are using these outlines as a full series, you could celebrate people who pick the practice you are exploring in the service. Perhaps they could be involved in leading or sharing stories.
* Explore our range of [resources](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwolresources/) for exploring MWOL (including videos), and some suggestions for [creative ideas for groups](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discipleship-pathways-travelling-together/being-a-discipleship-leader/exploring-a-methodist-way-of-life-as-a-church/).

**Discussion questions**

* Through which practice do you most easily tune into God? Or, if using the train analogy, which is your ‘home station’?
* How could you support others who find your practice difficult?
* Which practice do you find challenging, or even fearful? How could others in the community support you in exploring these?
* Are there are commitments that we as a community are neglecting? What could we do about this?

**Prayer ideas**

* Ask people to stand when their home station (or growth station) is called out and ask the people around them to pray aloud for them.
* Using the [MWOL postcards,](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGMWOLPC23/a-methodist-way-of-life-postcard-set) ask people to write or draw a prayer relating to one of the commitments. It might be their home or growth station, or a random station. The prayer could be for themselves, or for the whole community.

**Ways to respond**

* Go to [methodist.org.uk/PersonalDiscipleship](https://www.methodist.org.uk/personaldiscipleship)
* Use a postcard to journal over the next week. Write down your experiences of one of the commitments – perhaps one you find difficult, or the one that you’ll be exploring next week if you’re running the whole series. If journalling is a new practice, check out [our online guidance](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/journalling/).

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**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.

**Care**

**“We care for ourselves and those around us”**

**Key themes**

* It's all about love: love for God, other people and yourself. Loving each other is at the centre of our spiritual journey. Love transforms acts of service into acts of care (both are good to practise).
* How we love ourselves and each other reflects the way we believe Jesus loves us.
* This caring love is mutual – we both give it and receive it.

**Relevant Bible passages**

1 Kings 19:4-9; Mark 6: 30-32, 45-46; Luke 10:38-42

**Background reflection**

Society is always asking us to be more, buy more, do more. There is a constant pressure to do, want or be more, which can cause us to feel like we are constantly not doing well enough. A Methodist Way of Life (MWOL) should not end up as yet another thing we feel we have failed at. It is not a tick-box exercise, but a framework that can be used to help us grow in our faith as far as we are able to do so, with God’s help. This is a very important qualifier. It gives us permission to give ourselves a break. We are not superheroes, and should not aspire to be. The ‘Care’ commitment combines care for self as well as care for others because caring is a mutual practice involving both giving and receiving.

*This would be a good time to ask a discussion question about care.*

The practice of Sabbath in the story of creation continues throughout the Bible. In the first book of Kings, after Elijah has had an incredibly stressful time, the angels take care of his physical needs: God does not demand more prayer or action from him but allows him to rest from ‘doing’ and just ‘be’. God loves us, no strings attached. We must make time to listen to God’s voice and treat ourselves as if we are enough just as we are, not constantly trying to prove we are loveable.

From this strong base of prayer, self-knowledge and compassion, we are much more able to give to others with true generosity of spirit. Our personal well of love and compassion can only be deeper the more fulfilled and flourishing we feel. We also model good self-care to others.

*Ask a discussion question about hearing God’s voice.*

The Church is often very good at loving our neighbour, following part of the greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Mark 12:31, NRSVA). Many of us can think of times our church offered hospitality or food provision to those in need, as well as community spaces. But we can also think of many stories where caring for others has come at the detriment of caring for ourselves. We treat ourselves far more harshly than we ever treat others, at the disservice to ourselves and others.

The stress bucket analogy is one used in mental health training. The levels of stress we can deal with have a limit, and most of the time we are able to manage the incoming stresses of work, relationships, health and money, as these are counterbalanced by the things we do to relieve stress – prayer, resting, exercise, socialising and, of course, a good night’s sleep.

We are not naïve enough to think that our whole life can be fun, rewarding and energising. The more difficult parts of our lives are necessary, and these are the things that help us to grow. Yet there may be things in our lives that we could do more or less of to make us feel that we are flourishing and caring for ourselves a little better.

There are places in the Gospels where Jesus takes some time for himself and takes time for the disciples to have a break (eg Luke 5:16; Mark 6:30-32 and 45-6). He does it for a few different reasons – to recharge, to prepare, to spend concentrated time with God before making a big decision.

The story of Martha and Mary is sometimes cited to suggest that we should spend more time in prayer and Bible study, and less time in hospitality and service. But these are all good things – in fact, hospitality and service are two other commitments of MWOL! [Dr Lucy Peppiatt suggests](https://www.premierchristianity.com/columnists/misunderstanding-mary-and-martha/16186.article) that the underlying issue in the story is ‘fretting’. “Looking after our guests and making sure people are fed are good things... It’s not the work, but the *underlying worry* that’s the problem – and this can apply to any person in any situation.” What causes you to fret at the expense of your emotional, spiritual and mental health, so that you are missing out on the abundant life Jesus desires for us all (John 10:10)?

*Share what rest means to you and how you create spaces for prayer, but also for fun.*

**Further notes**

* MWOL, like other ‘rules of life’, is not just a mandate to more action. It is not asking us to do more than we are capable of and allows us lots of space just to ‘be’. Similarly, John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, at all the times you can, as long as ever you can.”
* God’s plan for us includes time to rest and have fun, as indicated in the observance of a Sabbath. There is a rich history and theology of the Sabbath, going right back to the creation story in the first two chapters of Genesis, where all the days lead us towards resting with God on the seventh day. This is part of our calling as Christians, and it is amazing what God will do with even small periods of rest. People will often say how after times of rest they feel both mentally and physically rejuvenated. God will bless and honour those times of Sabbath.
* Caring looks different for different people, dependent on our interests, levels of introversion/extraversion, etc. Let people know how they can show care for you. And ask other people how you can care for them, rather than making assumptions.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Make you feel my love – Adele

Brother, sister, let me serve you (*StF* 611)

For the world and all its people (*Sent by the Lord*, Wild Goose)

I will speak out for those who have no voices (*StF* 702)

Let love be real (*StF* 615)

Make me a channel of your peace (*StF* 707)

Pray for a world where every child (*StF* 527)

Would you walk by on the other side? (*StF* 257)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* The ‘PIES’ activity is a simple way to reflect on your health in four areas: physical, intellectual, emotional, and social. Give people time to reflect on their own health, where they are doing well, and where there is room for improvement. Create a board with space for each of these areas (decorate it with drawings or stickers) and ask people to write their celebrations and commitments as a way to check in with each other over coming weeks. Be alert to anything stirred up which may require pastoral support and/or immediate prayer.
* Write down the names of your job, family, friends and interests. Break those down further into the specific people, activities, tasks and groups that make up each section of their lives. Invite everyone to make a different mark or use a different colour for the things that are energising, draining, fun, challenging or rewarding.
* Spend some time thinking and praying about the shape of your life currently in all its variety; the life-giving and the challenging. How full is your stress bucket at the moment? Write down what a full life would look like for you. How close is it to how you live now? Is it realistic or would you be exhausted if you lived like that? Where is your Sabbath within it?

**Discussion questions**

* How are you caring for yourself in this phase of life?
* Who are you caring for at the moment?
* How can we hear the still small voice of God telling us we are loved?
* **What would you tell your childhood self about caring for yourself?**
* How can we be more loving to ourselves?
* What does an abundant life look like for you?
* What causes you to fret at the expense of your emotional, spiritual and mental health?

**Prayer ideas**

Lift burdens to God – name things that weigh on you, perhaps by writing them down and placing them in a bowl. Take a moment to simply lift these things to God, and wait in silence for any immediate response. Even if you hear nothing, thank God for listening to your concerns. Continue to be aware of God’s presence as you deal with these burdens over coming days, weeks and months.

Intercessory prayer – ask for ‘daily bread’ for yourself and for others, those things you need this day in order to be cared for. You may wish to write them down, draw them, speak them aloud, or share them with God in silence.

*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**

* For another take on the Mary and Martha story, you might like to listen to Rob Bell’s podcast [What She Knows](https://robbell.podbean.com/e/what-she-knows/).
* Create a timeline of your life, plotting key spiritual and life moments. Where are the times of joy? What was going on and how can you learn from this for the future?
* Golden circles exercise – in groups (no more than five), share three stories of times in your life when you felt joy and/or were at peace. Others in the group make notes on where they see similarities in your stories, e.g. always outside, always with other people. What can you learn from this?
* Plan a spa day, a meal with friends, a walk in the forest, a video-games marathon – whatever helps you care for yourself.

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**Service**

The Methodist calling to ‘Service’ contains three practices: challenging injustice, serving others, and seeking the flourishing of all creation. These practices relate to how we commit to serve people and the world around us, both near and far.

**Challenge**

**“We challenge injustice”**

**Key themes**

* God is a liberator. God always takes the side of people experiencing poverty and injustice and we are called to do the same (Isaiah 28:6).
* Around the globe and in their own local communities, Methodists are working for justice through responding to needs and campaigning for change.
* Challenging injustice is never easy – it is rare for a challenge to be welcome.
* Challenging injustice is something we can do as individuals and working together. It doesn’t have to be world-changing.
* There is a difference between helping people and challenging structures that create injustice. Both are important.
* It is important that we don’t see challenging injustice as an ‘us and them’ issue. There may be injustice to challenge, and people who are marginalised, within our Christian community. And there are many challenging injustice who don’t share our faith. We stand in solidarity regardless.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Amos 5:14-21; Micah 6.6-8; Isaiah 58:1-14; Luke 4:16-20

**Background reflection**

*Begin with a discussion question about fairness.*

“It’s not fair” is a common cry of two-year-olds and justice campaigners. Jesus told stories to people who live in a storytelling tradition, with stereotypical characters – landowners, workers, managers. In other parables we meet widows and judges, rich and poor, party hosts and party guests. Often the story has an element of unequal power.

In the parable of The Labourers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20, we think we know who the ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ are. Clearly the workers who have laboured all day have been cheated, because others who have worked for less hours are paid the same. But like the prophets of the Old Testament (eg Isaiah 5 and the Song of the Vineyard), Jesus tells a story with a twist.

In this story, the one with power chooses to be generous and those who think they are entitled – those privileged because of health, strength, reputation, or who they know – find they are worth no more and no less than everyone else. This is a shock and results in that age old cry, “It’s not fair!”

The cry of fairness can be related to two things – fair opportunities or fair outcomes. One common illustration of this difference is to imagine an adult and child trying to look over a fence. The adult is tall enough to look over, but the child is not. Fair opportunities treat all people equally – both people would be given a box to stand on.

But this would not change the outcome – the child still cannot see. While all people are equally important to God, their circumstances are not. Fair outcomes would re-distribute resources to achieve equality – both boxes are given to the child, so that both adult and child have the same view over the fence. Justice rooted in an understanding of God might go even further than ideas of fairness. What if the fence was removed entirely, liberating everyone from structural constraints, so that all can have abundant access to what is beyond the fence?

If we look again at the parable and imagine that God is the landowner, God desires that all will have abundant life (John 10:10). To pay less than the daily wage was to condemn people to hunger, even death. And so regardless of how many hours they worked, the landowner ensures there is a fair and equal outcome for all the workers.

When the landowner asks why workers are still in the marketplace at 5pm, they don’t say they didn’t want to work, they say “because no one has hired us”. We don’t know what circumstances meant they weren’t hired earlier in the day. All people are created equal in God’s image. But circumstances aren’t – money, violence, institutional racism, bias in gender, age, sexuality, disability and much more can create unequal situations.

The story makes many of us uncomfortable because our default mode is to assume we must earn our way into God’s love, or be good enough to pass some test of righteousness – it’s not easy to shift our thinking. No one can work hard enough or long enough to earn God’s love. It is given – and we see that in Jesus Christ. The God who wants all to have life, however the world measures their worth, is the same God who brings Jesus back from death to a new life, which marks the beginning of the new kingdom of love and grace.The way that the world often works, those who are chosen last are people experiencing the struggle against poverty, disabled people, members of minorities, refugees, the broken and unwanted. In the kingdom of heaven, these are the honoured guests – those who sit at the top table.

We like to think the world has changed, that things are fairer, more just. Yet in many contexts there are still people who are chosen last – considered to be of less worth because of discrimination. The moment human beings see others as worth less than themselves, injustice follows. We see this in the killing of George Floyd and the shooting of Jacob Blake. We see this when women’s refuges are daily having to turn women and children away because there is no room. We see this when children, women and men die attempting to cross rivers and seas to claim asylum. Living as people who recognise that every other person is precious to God calls on us to challenge injustice.

At the heart of most injustice is misuse of power and an attitude of scarcity – that there is only so much to go around, and I lose if someone else gains. This can be hard to challenge, particularly if we feel powerless to change anything. But though the deck may be stacked against us (or those close to us), we are all still able to act. It is never just someone else’s responsibility. We all have a part to play. And God entrusts those in power with a special responsibility for upholding justice.

When did you last cry “It’s not fair!”? Was it because you found out that people in your community are going hungry? Was it because asylum seekers and refugees are left to live without the means to support themselves and their families because of Government policies? Was it because you saw a person treated unfairly because of their colour, sexuality, disability or gender? Was it because you, or someone close to you, was treated unjustly? God, whose nature is just, yearns for justice in the world. What makes you want to challenge injustice?

**Further notes**

* Page 6-7 of the Conference Report, [A Justice-seeking Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/30703/justice-seeking-church-guide-to-report-1023.pdf), describes how the world might feel if God’s justice is present and how it feel where it is lacking, plus what it means to seek such justice. How would you describe this?
* A visual image for the fence metaphor (including its removal) is available [online](https://miro.medium.com/v2/resize%3Afit%3A720/format%3Awebp/0%2A6LevAbFoFBRi3O9P.png). It’s worth noting that a flaw in this metaphor is that the inequality is presented as an innate quality of the child – they’re too short. But as all people are created equally in the image of God, we must be mindful that inequality stems from social and institutional situations and attitudes towards people, not by how they are made or loved by God.
* The parable in Matthew is followed by Jesus predicting his death and his resurrection. The first will be last and the last will be first – the Alpha and Omega will become as one of the lowest of the low, dying an ignominious death. There is a link between the unfairness of what is done to the Son of Man and the theme of our parable – one who deserves everything, yet has everything taken away. As in the parable though, there is a twist – the desolation is not the end of the story – life will come.
* Grace is often uncomfortable – we find it hard to accept that God loves us, just as much as God loves those we hold in high esteem. It can be even more uncomfortable when we realise that God loves those we disregard or find despicable just as much as God loves us. Surely we have earned more love, more grace than those who hurt others, damage creation or don’t see the world the way we do?
* We might pat ourselves on the back and say, “We have God’s grace, there is nothing left to do.” And, in terms of earning salvation, we would be right. However, we know from Scripture and from Methodist teaching that we are called to respond to God’s grace – as recipients of the gift, we are transformed by love and grace – God’s Spirit works within us to bring about a new life, a fuller life, a life in which it troubles us that others are treated unfairly.
* A common way of differentiating between helping/serving people and challenging injustice is this parable: You are walking alongside a river when you realise there are people in the river drowning. You can see a place further up the river where they have fallen in, and where other people are also continuing to fall into the river. Rescuing people out of the river is an act of help and service. Travelling upriver to fix the problem so that more people don’t fall into the river is challenging injustice. Both are of equal importance, and which action we take will depend on our circumstances and opportunities, and on our personality and gifts.
* God calls all people and nations actively to work for peace and justice, liberation and transformation. No one person can solve these issues alone, but we can work out together how to respond to the injustice we see locally or globally – by letter writing, actions of generosity or joining campaigns. Each one of us can play a part in building the kingdom of heaven that Jesus described in the parable – not to earn our place there, but to celebrate that all are welcome.
* God calls us to live in hope and in ways that reflect God’s character and the pattern of God’s kingdom. So, seeking justice involves honesty and truth, and may demand protest and resistance, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately transformation.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Where is the love? – Black Eyed Peas

God of justice, Saviour to all (*StF* 699)

Hail to the Lord’s anointed (*StF* 228)

Love inspired the anger (*StF* 253)

Oh freedom – freedom is coming (*StF* 697)

Send down the fire of your justice (*StF* 413)

Show me how to stand for justice (*StF* 713)

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! (*StF* 186)

When I needed a neighbour (*StF* 256)

And see [Walking with Micah](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/seasons-and-themes/themes/walking-with-micah/walking-with-micah-as-evangelists/) on *StF+*

**Creative activity suggestions**

Create a display of different types of injustice (this could be using photos representing people impacted by or challenging injustice, or writing words on big bits of paper). Around each, write ways that you are currently challenging this injustice, either as individuals or as a community. In another colour, write down any opportunities to challenge injustice where you aren’t currently, but you feel God might be calling you. Look at the links in the ‘ways to respond’ section for ideas.

**Discussion questions**

* What do you think is ‘not fair’? (Depending on ages this could include anything from a friend who has more sweets than you, to warfare.)
* Who would be the last to be chosen to work in the vineyard today?
* What issues of injustice or unfairness in your community and in the world (small and big) are you concerned about?
* What are you doing in response (as individual followers of Jesus and as a Methodist church community and family)?
* What do you need to help you with keeping this commitment?
* **In what ways are we powerful/powerless when it comes to an issue of injustice (eg bullying, homeless, human trafficking, poverty, racism)?**
* **Look at pages 6-7 of the Conference Report,** [A Justice-seeking Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/30703/justice-seeking-church-guide-to-report-1023.pdf)**. Where can you see signs of God’s justice, or where it is lacking? Where are you seeking justice, as individuals and as a community?**

**Prayer ideas**

Find a ‘token’ to represent different marginalised groups who are treated unjustly or prevented from living life to the full (such as a photo, a campaign button, an item of food or clothing, a toy boat, etc).

Hand them out and ask people to pray (out loud, silently or in writing) for people represented by that token. Pray also for discernment from God in how you can challenge injustice as individuals and a community.

*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**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Challenge](http://methodist.org.uk/challenge)
* Explore what it means to be a [Justice-seeking Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church/). The Methodist Church is supporting the Let’s End Poverty movement, calling for a UK where poverty can’t hold anyone down. Find out how you can get involved at [letsendpoverty.co.uk](http://www.letsendpoverty.co.uk)
* Visit [jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://jointpublicissues.org.uk/) to find out more about how Methodists and other Christians are responding to injustice – and how you can get involved.
* Visit [allwecan.org.uk](http://allwecan.org.uk/) to learn about how the Methodist relief and development charity addresses issues of injustice worldwide and find out how your church can give generously.
* Check out [secondhelpings.org.uk/about-us](http://secondhelpings.org.uk/about-us) to see how Stamford Methodist Church welcomes all, no matter their circumstances, to have food and to build community.

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**Service**

The Methodist calling to ‘Service’ contains three practices: challenging injustice, serving others, and seeking the flourishing of all creation. These practices relate to how we commit to serve people and the world around us, both near and far.

**Flourish**

**“We care for creation and all God's gifts”**

**Key themes**

* The universe is an expression of God’s loving, creative nature.
* We are part of the earth as well as the universe, lovingly woven from the same fabric.
* We are currently in a **climate emergency** requiring urgent action, but the good news is that by learning about God’s love for creation and our place within it, we can learn to take care of the world we live in.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Genesis 1:26-28

**Background reflection**

The universe is an expression of God’s loving, creative nature. From the very beginning of the Bible to the very end, we see that creation is at the heart of God’s story. Throughout scripture we are told that creation and everything within it remains God’s (eg Deuteronomy 10:14; Job 12:7-10). This is very different to many other ancient religious texts, where creation is often birthed out of violence, bodily secretions, or seems to be a completely unimportant afterthought in the stories of petty gods.

Genesis 1:26-28 is one of two biblical accounts of the creation of the first humans. The term ‘dominion’ might suggest that human beings are the most important of all God’s creations, and they have been given the job to rule over and subdue creation and can treat the environment as they wish. But this diminishes the importance of creation, making it seem to be important only in service to humanity, not for its own self. If treated in this way it is clear that our environment will suffer, to the detriment of all. There are still some Christians who have this focus within their theology, but it is much less common now.

Instead, we are meant to care for God’s creation; to make sure that it is looked after well and flourishes. This is clearly a much better attitude, and quite a common view today. It ensures that the world is taken better care of; that endangered species are protected and habitats preserved. It’s the reason we grow bee friendly flowers in our gardens, or campaign to protect the rainforest.

That still leaves room for a view of creation as separate from us; that we are cultivating it as though it were an asset.

Key to this is our understanding of being made in the image of God. This is what sets us apart from the rest of creation. To be made in God’s image means that we represent God in our world; that we act towards the world in the same way God does. Remember, God called creation ‘good’ before humans appeared on the scene.

If we are to be like God, we need to understand what God is like. The Bible relates how God brings restoration and healing to all of creation (Isaiah 65:25, 66:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:22-23). God cares for, nurtures and loves. God doesn’t give up on creation when things look dismal, but instead finds a way for re-creation. Therefore, our job is to look at how we can restore creation and help creation to flourish. This brings glory to God, and also helps us live restored lives.

So, what next? The way people respond to this is deeply personal and depends on their current involvement, as well as their resources, time, gifts and talents. Everyone can start somewhere, even if it’s as simple as switching from a bath to a shower, or how and where we do our weekly grocery shop. Start small, and build up from there.

*Ask a discussion question about how people can respond to this.*

**Further notes**

* Human beings as co-creations: instead of emphasising the uniqueness of humanity, we should focus on how we are part of creation. The Hebrew *v’yirdu* can mean ‘dominion with’, but never ‘over’, so we are meant to be alongside creation; our well-being is intrinsically linked with creation, not separate from it. God looked at all of creation and saw that it was good. But this still begs the question what Genesis means when it tells us that God mandated us to have ‘dominion’ (Genesis 1:28).
* It is easy to feel despondent about the state of the environment; that it is too big a problem for us to make a real change. It is important to uphold our belief that God’s purposes will prevail in the end. There are many stories of ecological hope to draw on, including these three (you may want to do further research to find out more): Humpback whales are coming back from the brink of extinction; Iceland is transforming from coal reliance to sustainable energy; A million seagrass seeds have been planted off the Pembrokeshire coast to combat carbon emissions.
* Although there is a specific MWOL commitment for creation care, it is inextricably linked to the commitment to challenge injustice, particularly racial injustice. [The “Olive Agenda”](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/missional-discipleship-and-justice/) is a complementary mix of the "Green Agenda" (predominately a white middle-class agenda focused on protecting green spaces and animals) and the "Brown Agenda" (predominantly a majority world agenda focused on the effects of climate change on racial injustice and poverty). The “Olive Agenda” is concerned with the ecosystem, biodiversity and redemption of the whole cosmos: human, animal and environment.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Big yellow taxi – Joni Mitchell

For the fruits of all creation (*StF* 124)

For the healing of the nations (*StF* 696)

God the maker of the heavens (resoundworship.org)

Let us build a house where love can dwell (*StF* 409)

O God who set the stars in place (raise.org)

The world God imagines (*StF+)*

Touch the earth lightly (*StF* 729)

We follow the Lord along the gradual road to heaven (*StF* 730)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* Collect a variety of objects from the natural world: an acorn, a leaf, a flower, a piece of fruit, a bird’s feather, etc. As much as possible, collect things that have fallen from the ground rather than picking them off trees or flowers. Ask people to hold the objects and picture the greater ecosystem it has come from. Imagine that ecosystem flourishing – what does that look like? Where is humanity in the picture? Where is God? You may wish to ask people to draw this picture, or describe it through written or spoken words.
* Use the carbon calculator (see “Ways to respond” below) to consider ways to improve as individuals and a community. Mark your action commitments by creating a poster, or writing on the back of [MWOL postcards](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGMWOLPC23/a-methodist-way-of-life-postcard-set).

**Discussion questions**

* How are you caring for creation?
* How might God be asking you to go further to be part of a flourishing creation?
* What is your biggest challenge in responding to the climate emergency?
* **What would you do about care for creation if you knew you couldn’t fail?**
* Have a conversation about the three areas listed under “Ways to respond”: grow in love, financial decisions, and lobbying for change. What are some simple actions you could take personally? What could you do as a church?

**Prayer ideas**

Create a PowerPoint presentation with images of endangered species (animals and plants) and landscapes across the world impacted by climate change. You could include a short sentence explaining how they are at risk, or any organisations campaigning for their protection. Pray for protection of people and planet. Pray for wisdom for organisations and people campaigning to protect them. Pray for discernment from God on the parts we can all play to help all creation to flourish.

*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**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Flourish](http://methodist.org.uk/flourish) and resources for [Action for Hope](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/environment-and-climate-change/), the Methodist Church’s project to become a net-zero carbon emissions church by 2030.
* Look for others who are on this journey, such as community groups tackling local or global issues (many international charities have local groups), or by creating a team to engage with [ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/) on behalf of the church.
* Grow in our love of creation: go for walks; grow some herbs on our window ledge; learn the names of trees, plants and wildlife in our area; plant trees to mark special events.
* Support creation with our financial decisions: let ecological considerations affect our spending and living; buy local produce; try to shop organically; consider animal welfare and fair trade; consider your investment in pension schemes or company shares; reduce water and energy use; find alternative transport to cars.
* Lobby for change where we can: write letters to our MPs supporting recycling, green transport, and renewable energy initiatives. Joining local ecological groups can help in discovering what action we can take.
* Use this [carbon footprint calculator](http://carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx) to raise awareness of your own impact on the carbon levels in the atmosphere, and therefore on global climate change.

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**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.

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**Evangelism**

There are three different approaches to evangelism in a Methodist Way of Life: ‘Tell’ is about what we say (conversation with others), ‘Share’ is about what we do (our loving actions with individuals and communities) and ‘Live’ is about being the image of God (naturally radiating God’s love, to draw people to Jesus).

**Live**

**“We live in a way that draws people to Jesus”**

**Key themes**

* We are formed by the people and culture around us. But we are all also made in God's image, so let that shine out (Ephesians 5:1-2).
* You have great power to influence and affect other people by the way you live your life.
* Live authentically as a whole self; the self who God made you to be. In this way we worship God in our day-to-day lives at work, at home, and out and about.
* Living A Methodist Way of Life roots us in God and opens us to allows the love of God to shine out of us.
* That’s not to say that any of us are perfect. But there is something luminously attractive about people open to God making us more holy and loving each day.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Matthew 5:14-16; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5

**Background reflection**

We are called to live as people of light, reflecting something of the light of Christ wherever we are. So, you are to “let your light shine before others” (Matthew 5:16). The word ‘let’ here is important. It means more than ‘allow’, it’s closer in meaning to ‘ensure’. This is why “no one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand: and it gives light to all in the house” (Matthew 5:15). This light shows others something of God – in the same way that we can see something of God in others.

While we often talk of how our actions can draw people to Jesus (Matthew 5:16 says “they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”), we are perhaps less likely to speak of how we live – who we are, our ‘being’ – might do the same. Perhaps this is because it seems like a heavy burden, and an impossible task. Lots of us feel we’re inadequate Christians. We’re inclined to think to ourselves “What could I possibly do that would draw anyone to Jesus?” We feel we must be perfect – to never lie, to stop swearing, to give up smoking, etc. The activities may change over decades (there are some in Ephesians 5 we may agree with, and some that might trouble us), and some feel bigger than others, but ultimately it all points to a suggestion that we must be ‘more holy’ than we are. This can feel like a constant requirement to ‘do better’ or ‘try harder’.

But Jesus does not ask us to be perfect, only to be a Christlike reflection, authentic to who God has made us to be in God’s image. Like the disciples, we try to imitate Jesus, but in the full knowledge that we will fall short. The Bible is full of flawed characters who were, nonetheless, used by God. King David in the Old Testament and the Apostle Peter in the New Testament are prime examples. What they have in common is that they tend to try to hold on to God even after they’ve failed spectacularly. You cannot derail God’s plans!

We are made in God’s image, each unique and precious, and called to be “beloved children, and live in love” (Ephesians 1). What that means will be different for each one of us, and will also be affected by the cultures and communities we are part of. Let your relationship with God shine out by living authentically as a whole self; the self who God made you to be. In this way we worship God in our day-to-day lives at work, at home, and [out and about](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN2IcU9Wzt4).

The pursuit of holiness – for this is what it means to seek to live in a way that draws others to Jesus, that is, to live like the people of God, reflecting something of God’s goodness and glory in the world – is not reserved for super-spiritual or Advanced Level Christians. Such sanctification is the work of God, not something that we have to make happen ourselves through hard work or strength of will. It’s essential Christianity for all of us, and will reflect the authentic, diverse nature of the Christian family.

**Further notes**

* When we think about this commitment, we are reminded to open our eyes to noticing God in the lives of others too. Grace is not only at work in the lives of Christians – this is a particularly Methodist understanding of grace, that is preveniently working in people’s lives who don’t know God.
* It’s called A Methodist Way of Life, and this should be a clue. We’ll spend our lives working out how to be good Methodist Christians. Don’t expect to find a shortcut to spiritual growth. There aren’t any.
* Some Christians will talk about being “salt and light” or “God’s ambassadors”. Matthew 5:13-16 is quoted by many Christians to refer to how we reflect God in the world. It is worth noting that Jesus does not here refer to good works (see the session on the “Share” commitment) but that “You” are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”. This passage follows the Beatitudes, in which Jesus speaks of people’s heart-postures rather than their deeds (though these naturally follow). We are the “city built on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14); not just our activity but our very nature produces light that can be seen in every direction.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Don’t stop believing – Journey

A new commandment (*StF* 242)
Be the light in my darkness (*StF+)*
Christ be in my waking (*MP* 1264)
Come with me, come wander (*StF* 462)
Have you heard God’s voice (*StF* 662)
Jesus, all for Jesus (*StF* 555)
Sacred the body God has created (*StF* 618)
Take my life and let it be (*StF* 566)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* Create an ‘integrity hall of fame’ with images of people from the Bible. Share a few key facts about each person (both how they faithfully served God and the things they got wrong). Ask the group to vote who has the most integrity – who is most

authentically imitating God? Some good options are David, Ruth, Paul, Hannah and Mary mother of Jesus.

* Make a pin board with key attributes to living authentically as those created in God’s
image (the fruit of the Spirit is a good starting point). Invite everyone to write each other’s names by the attributes people embody to celebrate and honour each other. In another colour, ask people to write their own name by an attribute that they would like to develop.

**Discussion questions**

* How have you become more authentically you recently?
* **If you wrote a book about yourself, what would be the key message? What would you call it?**
* In what ways do you sometimes hide behind your own imperfections as an excuse not to be involved in bringing others to faith?
* Which flawed character from the Bible most appeals to you as a story of God using someone for God’s mission?
* In what ways do other people you know “let their light shine before others”?
* The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) is a beautiful illustration of how God works within us. Which is you – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control? Which do you struggle with?

**Prayer ideas**

Ask God to give you peaceliving in relationship with God. Thank God for grace for when you fall short. Ask for courage and commitment in areas you would like to grow in.

*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**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Live](http://methodist.org.uk/live) and [resources for evangelism](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist/), including [Everyone an Evangelist](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist/)
* Tell someone what you love about them.
* Use a personality tool like the [Johari Window](https://kevan.org/johari), [Enneagram](https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions), [Clifton Strengths](https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252137/home.aspx), or [Myers Briggs](https://www.16personalities.com/) to learn more about your personality and gifts. Many of these are particularly insightful when utilised in groups.
* Ask a friend which of the fruits of the Spirit they see in you, and share which you see in them.

**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

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**Our Calling: Worship**

The umbrella term ‘Worship’ in Our Calling has three different dimensions: as well as worship in the traditional sense, there are also prayer, and noticing God. These practices might be called ‘breathing in’ God; they are intentional in connecting us to God and inform how we live in the world.

**Notice**

**“We notice God in Scripture and the world”**

**Key themes**

* God is near and findable, but not completely.
* The Bible is an ancient collection of writings of different people’s experiences of God at work in their lives. It helps us understand and experience God for ourselves.
* We can also notice God in science and nature, our relationships with others, in our work, in books, films, podcasts, and other leisure activities, and in world events.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Luke 24:27; John 5:36-39; Romans 1:20, 15:4-6

**Background reflection**

*Looking for the God who is already looking for us*

Have you ever played hide and seek with a child who is slightly too young to understand the rules? You stand in the middle of the room and say, “Where’s so and so?” and the child leaps out and enthusiastically cries “Here I am!” The child wants to be found.

This is how God responds when we look for God. God wants to be found. The Bible tells us of a God who does not just reach out to individuals, but who is active in the world and tells us of a way of life that is meant to be lived. Isaiah urges us to go out into the whole world, with joy. Some people find God more easily in the world, others find God more easily through Scripture. Although we do not always know the reason for this, it is important that we find ways to share our different experiences and encourage each other.

Theologian John Calvin said that the Bible is like a pair of spectacles: by looking through Scripture, God’s presence and action in creation comes into focus for us. Theologian John Stott talked of ‘double listening’, with a Bible in one hand and newspaper (or smart phone!) in the other. These are important reminder that we do not read Scripture to learn facts, but to change how we see our lives and the world around us.

*This could be a good time to ask a discussion question about hidden treasures.*

*The Bible*

When we read the Bible, we are not primarily trying to learn more facts, but encounter God and to be transformed. We want to respond to the gracious God who always seeks us. Isaiah emphasises a living word – how do we seek God in the Bible and the world, in a way that is faithful to Isaiah’s vision?

Bible study can be a joy, but also a struggle, and people have wildly different experiences of encountering God.

*Share your own joys and struggles. You may also wish to ask people to share theirs. Thank everyone, without passing judgement.*

*The world*

Many people talk of having spiritual experiences in nature. Others see God in films or in art. Science, politics, newspapers, books, podcasts and sports can all be ways that people connected with God. This is different from noticing God in the Bible – it is more focused on our own experiences or the thoughts of other people, rather than words from ancient times. But it can be just as important in our spiritual lives.

And yet, we will never find God completely. There are times when God may feel far away, or too big or intimidating to comprehend. Each faith journey is personal, but even the greatest saints have spoken of times when they struggled to sense God’s presence. Most of us experience times when the Bible seems to speak directly to us and other times when it is confusing, frustrating or just plain boring. When we find passages difficult, it matters that we have a good sense of the ‘grand truths’, the picture of who God is, which we learn from all of Scripture.

We can then look for what God is doing in the world around us – and seek to join in.

**Further notes**

* What is the Bible? It can be referred to as a book with an overarching story, or a library of books each with their own narrative and purpose. It is filled with different genres (from history to fable, from poetry to biography) and is interpreted by different people through different lenses, different degrees of literalness, and with very different application. Very few people read the Bible in its original languages, and even those people bring their own biases, interpretations and experiences. This can be a good thing – we can learn a lot from someone else’s understanding of a Bible passage. But we also need to be aware of our own, and others, input. This can also help us to be more understanding when we disagree.
* It is important to acknowledge that the Bible contains passages that most of us find difficult, and which we need help to interpret. Remember: God is seeking you. Founder of Methodism John Wesley eventually changed his teaching on assurance of salvation because he met faithful Christians who had never had the heart-warming experience that was so important to him.
* The Bible was written down at a time when most people could not read. The vast majority was originally intended to be heard or read in community, and reading the Scriptures together, through preaching and in small groups, has always been at the heart of Methodism. This is a challenge to the whole church, not just individuals. Have you tried listening to Scripture, perhaps to longer sections than are read in church? It can be interesting to compare different translations or, if possible, look up words or sections in the original languages. Free online interlinear Bibles are available: [biblehub.com/interlinear](https://biblehub.com/interlinear).
* Isaiah talks about God as someone who “will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). He also speaks of the word of God as being fruitful and having a purpose. How does that help us seek God in the Bible and

the world? Wesley talked about interpreting Scripture “according to the grand truths which run through the whole” (Notes on Romans 12:6). Our overall sense of those ‘grand truths’ matters in how we read particular verses. We seek the God of Jesus, God who is with us in everything. We seek the God who cares about justice and mercy and the God who left the safety of heaven to be with us in our struggles.

* The idea that God seeks us before we seek God and that everything we do is a response to God’s grace, is central to our understanding of the gospel. Yet sometimes this gets lost when we talk about our practice of spiritual disciplines.
* Paul’s letters often greet multiple people, and would have been read aloud to the community. Various passages in the Old Testament (such as Nehemiah and Ezra) show the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) being read out loud to the assembled people. Isaiah uses both the singular and plural tense when he addresses his audience. English hides this, and we tend to read ‘you’ as always meaning ‘you singular’, the individual.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

As – Stevie Wonder

From the highest of heights (*StF* 48)

In the darkness of the still night (*StF* 109)

It’s there in the newborn cry (Your grace finds me) (*MP* 1312)

Listen for God who speaks in our hearts (*StF+)*

Looking back through it all (Skies) (*SoF* 2954)

Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders (*StF* 158)

O God, you search me and you know me (*StF* 728) based on Psalm 139

O Lord, our Lord, throughout the earth (*StF* 112)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* [A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1987/fo-statement-a-lamp-to-my-feet-and-a-light-to-my-path-1998.pdf) explores different Methodist approaches to the Bible. Write the following two sentences on pieces of paper, place them on opposite sides of the room, and ask everyone to start in a line between them, according to how much they agree with each statement. Ask a couple of people to share why they placed themselves there, and how you can learn from each other. “I find it bewildering that the Bible has been interpreted in so many different ways” / “I find it exciting that the Bible has spoken in such different ways to people in different times and places” (taken from page 651).
* Engage with the Bible in a different way to usual. If you normally read a message, use a video or audio recording to present a Bible passage or story. You could use a TakeTime reflection (the one on the [Notice commitment page](https://www.methodist.org.uk/notice) might be useful, or there are others on [each of the commitment pages](https://www.methodist.org.uk/visiteverystation)) and ask different people to share their reflections – where is God in the story? Or be ambitious and organise an improv performance, with props and volunteers of all ages from the congregation.
* Alternatively, explore dramatic interpretations like *The Bible* or *The Chosen* (available on streaming platforms) or summaries like those available from [the Bible Project on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/%40bibleproject). While such dramas always come with authorial and directorial interpretation, they can also help us to experience things in familiar stories in a
new way.
* Give everyone a piece of paper (ideally A3 but A4 is acceptable) and some coloured pens. Ask them to draw a timeline of their life, noting down all the important moments (eg marriage, meeting their best friend, starting a new school or job, moving house, leaving home for the first time, retiring, having a child/grandchild).

With another pen, add the moments when they are aware of noticing God in their life. One way of thinking about these moments is as ‘glimmers’ or ‘micro joys’ – moments when you get a sense of joy, peace, or connection to God’s depth and truth, in the middle of everyday life. Write down what happened, and whether there are any similarities in those moments (eg you were always outside, reading the Bible, in family settings). Encourage people to think about what difference this might make to the way they expect to notice God in future. Encourage one or two people to share something from their timeline, and pray for everyone.

**Discussion questions**

* Where have you noticed God recently? This might be a moment of divine peace, a ‘God-incidence’, something unexpected happening, an answer to prayer, or many other things. How is God revealing Godself to you? How might God feel hidden, and what might we do in response?
* Which part of the Bible is important to you right now?
* How would you describe the Bible to someone you met on a bus?
* What does it mean to you to look for God in the world? In what ways is this easy? In what ways is it more difficult?
* How could you encourage other people to notice the hidden treasure of God’s presence in their life? Watch the Revd Gill Newton, the Methodist President 2023-2024, [address to Conference in 2023](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98u03lmhzGU&t=1788s) for more.
* How can we be the kind of church in which people who do not feel confident with the Bible can find the help they need?
* How can we as a community seek God in the Bible and the world? How do we welcome spiritual seekers to join us in this?
* What are your ‘grand truths’ that lie at the heart of the Bible’s message? If you had to sum up the ‘master story’ that the Bible tells, what would you say?

**Prayer ideas**

* Read together a prayer from the Bible and respond with your own prayer.
* What Bible story or book do you struggle with? Pray for an open heart and mind in noticing God in it, for wisdom in seeking answers, and peace in coming to terms with a lack of knowledge.

*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/Notice](http://methodist.org.uk/notice) for ideas on how to start noticing God, or [methodist.org.uk/NoticingGod](http://methodist.org.uk/noticinggod) for ideas on how to go deeper.
* Journal for just one minute at the end of each day – where have you noticed God in the Bible or the world today? You might like to share your thoughts with others in your church or small group, either in your regular meetings or by text or in a WhatsApp group.
* Attend events from organisations such as Christians in Science, Christians in Politics, Christians in the Arts and many others to seek God in the world and learn from others.
* Explore how noticing God in the world relates to Methodist commitments for [the flourishing of creation](https://methodist.org.uk/flourish) and [challenging injustice](https://methodist.org.uk/challenge).
* Consider joining or starting a book or film club (or sports, theatre, gaming, etc) with the intention of noticing God (or spiritual themes) in so-called ‘secular’ arts. Subscribe to [The Friday Fix](https://thefridayfix.home.blog/) to explore God in music.

**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

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**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.

**Open**

**“We practise hospitality and generosity”**

**Key themes**

* We meet God in relationship with people. Being ‘open’ may include being open-hearted, open-minded, open-walleted and open-homed (all forms of generosity and hospitality).
* Hospitality may include learning about and from other people, as well as cooking meals or hosting parties. It’s not always us being hospitable to someone else – it’s a blessing to receive hospitality too.
* Generosity may involve money, but it doesn’t have to. We can be generous with our time, gifts and ideas. Sometimes, time is a more valuable currency than anything else.
* Though such generous openness may involve sacrifice, it is rarely right to give in such a way that we are unable to care for ourselves and our dependents.
* This must be a mutual practice. If we only give, we place ourselves in positions of power over others. Our task is to listen, recognise and be transformed by God at the margins.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 25:35-40; Luke 6:38; Acts 2:40-46, 20:35; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2, 16

**Background reflection**

There is a widely quoted African saying that can be translated, “A person is a person through other persons”. That can be put more emphatically still: We are truly human only in relationship with others – in generous and hospitable relationships with others. Every person is made uniquely in the image of God, and so we meet God in our relationship with other people.

Within the context of the Our Calling and A Methodist Way of Life, this commitment is an expression of ‘learning and caring’ – an activity for being together in Christian Fellowship. It is a partner to the commitment of service, which considers how we act in the world. Of course, we can be generous to all, and all may be generous to us. But just as the relationship we have with family and friends is deeper than the one we have with strangers,

we might expect our relationship with others in our church to be different than that in our wider community.

Generosity and hospitality can be expressed as acting with an attitude of ‘openness’. It may include being open-hearted, open-minded, open-walleted and open-homed. It may involve a sharing of money, time, gifts, ideas, or possessions. A discussion of hospitality and generosity needs to consider the context of being a follower of Christ today and the challenges your community may be facing with regard to the need for hospitality and generosity. What is it people need, and how can you respond with the gifts God has given you? Perhaps you are a terrible cook, but could give away produce from your garden.

Often we focus on how we should be generous and hospitable. We can point to countless examples in the Bible. But it is important that these are mutual practices; that we receive as well as give. You might hate organising birthday parties, but have a friend who would be delighted to throw one for you. If we only give, we place ourselves in positions of power

over others. We can unintentionally set ourselves up as heroes, or sacrificial servants. But receiving is a blessing that can be transformational to us and to the people who give. We have no stories of Jesus welcoming people into his home, but many of the time he spent accepting invitations from others. Make a point of accepting from others, as well as giving. Our task is to listen, recognise and be transformed by God at the margins.

The story of the widow’s offering in Mark 12 is often given as an example of how generosity is not about the amount we give relative to others, but about heart-attitude: Do we give to show off to others, or out of a position of love for God and others? It has even been used to justify extreme sacrificial giving, as the widow gave “everything she had, all she had to live on”. But some commentators note that this story comes immediately after Jesus has condemned the temple scribes for “devour[ing] widows’ houses”. As churches, we must be aware of what we ask of people (whether money or time) and whether it is always right to ask for or accept what people may be prepared to give, even when it is not healthy for them.

Though generous openness may involve sacrifice, we should not ask someone to give in such a way that they are unable to care for themselves and their dependents.

The ‘live’ practice of MWOL commits us to living “in a way which draws people to Jesus”. While this should not be a hidden motive for our generosity and hospitality, we should be aware of the impression we give of the character of God by the way we both practise and receive an attitude of openness.

**Further notes**

* The caution in Romans 12:2 to avoid conforming to the patterns of this world has been used to refer to many things. Perhaps one of the most fundamental within post-modern society in the UK are patterns of self-interest and selfishness. For some of us, being open may be counter-cultural; for others, it might be accepting openness from others.
* Understandings of hospitality and generosity vary greatly between cultures – not just internationally, but within countries as well. We can learn from one another’s different practices so that we act out of relationship, not misguided intention. Being hospitable and generous calls for equal treatment of all, even when they’re different from us or if we are wary of their culture or origin.
* A story from South Africa by the Revd Dr Jongikaya Zihle, from *Proclaiming the Way*:

“A young man had been held in a detention centre where he had been kept cold and naked for fourteen days. He was suddenly released far from home, without any clothes. It was dusk as he ran from his captors towards the smoke-filled and dusty township nearby.

A middle-aged woman ran out of her dilapidated shack dwelling to cover him with a blanket. As it grew darker, and he continued to run in the direction of home, a kind man offered him a t-shirt and a pair of short grey trousers. Still clutching the musty blanket, he was stopped by another fatherly figure who offered him food and shelter for the night (in a two-roomed dwelling with his wife and six children). In the morning, on his way to a delivery job, this stranger offered to take him home, a 23-mile diversion from his work route.

“All these people were unknown to the prisoner, but all were aware of how things were under the oppressive system in Apartheid South Africa, and anyone seeing someone in the young man’s situation would respond unquestioningly in offering generous care.

“This is my own story. The care and compassion, generosity and selflessness that I experienced at this difficult time contributed to making me the person that I am today. Without the willingness of these people to share of themselves, and to be hospitable to a stranger, I don’t know where my life’s journey would have taken me. Hospitality and generosity produced a burning heart, willing to heed the call to ‘do all the good I can, by all the means I can and in all the ways I can’ in a world in need of God’s love. That has been, and continues to be, the defining marker for a Methodist Christian to this day!”

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Anytime you need a friend – Mariah Carey

Come all you vagabonds (ultimate-guitar.com)

Come, my table is a meeting place (*StF* 581) *communion*

For all he came, for all he lived (*StF+)*

In this house all people will be welcome (*StF+)*

Let earth and heaven agree (*StF* 358)

Let us build a house where love can dwell (*StF* 409)

**Creative activity suggestions**

Place different kinds of sweets on chairs throughout the room. Vary the number of sweets on each chair and leave some chairs without any sweets. How do people respond? Without shaming anyone, reflect on people’s motives for giving away sweets, for keeping them, for asking for them, etc. Did people give away a sweet they didn’t want or their favourite sweet? Did people feel they could ask for any sweet or just take what was offered? Make sure that everyone has a sweet at the end!

**Discussion questions**

* How have you shown hospitality and generosity recently? Think about your money, time, gifts, possessions, and ideas.
* How have you received or accepted hospitality and generosity lately?
* Which do you find easier, being generous or accepting it? Why do you think this is?
* In Acts 2:44, “all who believed were together and had all things in common”. Some cultures may still live like this, but many do not. What could we learn from this posture of openness for our own Christian communities?
* What different understandings of hospitality and generosity do people in the group have? How can we learn from one another?
* What would you do differently about generously loving others and giving and receiving hospitality if we knew the world was ending tomorrow?
* Where is God encouraging you in hospitality and generosity? What holds you back?

**Prayer ideas**

Put four bowls on a table and give people four tokens (small pieces of paper, Lego bricks, etc). Add a sign to each bowl – receiving hospitality, giving hospitality, being generous, and accepting generosity. Ask people to place their tokens in the four bowls to either thank God for someone else, or to ask for guidance in their own practice.

Encourage each person to place the tokens in whatever way they want to. They might put one token in each bowl, all four tokens in one bowl, etc.

*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**

* Analyse your charity and church giving. Is God placing anything on your heart?
* Organise a social occasion for others in your church such as a meal or walk.
* Practise saying “yes” to offers of help, if this is something you find difficult. Think of it as a gift to them.

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**Our Calling: Worship**

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**Pray**

**“We pray daily”**

**Key themes**

* God loves spending time with you.
* There are many ways to pray and it’s good to experiment to find ways that suit you.
* Prayer is simply a name for communicating with God. It’s not a daily tick box exercise but should be a way we build relationship with Jesus.
* Daily prayer should be an invitation to spend time with God, not a burden that needs to be completed.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Matthew 6: 5-15; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

**Background reflection**

Two common understandings of how to pray are carving out specific times (alone or in groups, aloud or in silence, following patterns or freewheeling); and praying ‘like breathing’ – every second of every day you are in God’s presence.

*Ask the group how they pray and whether they find prayer easy or hard. Rather than a discussion, this might be a good moment to use the ‘burdens’ creative activity.*

Let’s look at some of the ‘daily’ patterns we see in the Bible *(see further notes for more details)*. Daily labour may suggest weariness – prayer may sometimes feel like weary work. But daily listening is a liberating joy of attending to God, and daily asking is a counter-cultural reliance on God – an unburdening of ourselves to rely on God, rather than taking everything on ourselves.

*Ask the group to think about rhythms in their own life. Which are wearying? Which are unburdening? Discuss the voices they hear daily, and how they could be more attentive to God’s voice.*

The purpose of prayer is not to tick a box every day, but to live in communication with God. It’s not about technique or accomplishment, it’s about opening channels to listen and to ask for what we need. We all do this differently. Perhaps we need to learn how to listen more and ask more. Such communication is not a chore, but a delight. Praying daily may begin with regularly reminding ourselves that God wants to communicate with us at every moment, because of God’s great love for us.

**Further notes**

* [*Sunshine and showers*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/sunshine)is a six-session prayer course from the Methodist Church with lots of helpful information and activities around prayer. As well as incorporating some of the material into this service, it may also be a great way for some members of the community to continue exploring prayer after the service.
* Use of the word ‘daily’ throughout the Bible – daily labourers (Exodus 5) are oppressed by the demand for the same levels of daily productivity, daily offerings (eg Exodus 29:38-46; Numbers 28:3; Ezra 3:4; Ezekiel 43:25), daily wages/providing daily needs (eg Deuteronomy 24:15). Daily prayer may similarly seem like an impossible target that results in weariness and feelings of failure.
* Daily listening (Proverbs 8:32-36) – God describes the happiness of those who are attentive to God. This sort of living, or praying, is a liberating listening to and seeking after God, not about a system. In a contribution to BBC Radio 2’s *Pause for Thought* in October 2005, Rowan Williams used the image of sunbathing to illustrate how we encounter God in prayer: just relax and let it happen.
* Daily asking (Luke 11:1-14) – our culture promotes self-sufficiency and independence; it moves us away from the habit of expressing need and asking for help. But prayer is for the tough times too. Jesus turned to God when drained (Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16), when making hard decisions (Luke 6:12), in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36), in bereavement (John 11:41). Daily bread in the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:11; Luke 3) can stand for a range of needs; whatever we need for strength for the day. Just as in the wilderness when manna was given (Exodus 16), God’s grace comes in small packages that are soon exhausted – precisely so that we will go back and ask for more. What do you need today?
* Daily unburdening: Prayer is not meant to be a burden, rather an unburdening. It invites us to lay down our heavy packs. In many parts of the world, it is common to see people – mainly women – carrying enormous baskets on their heads. They may be setting off to work in their farmlands, carrying their tools, food and water for the day – or returning at the end of the day with produce to feed a family. Their poise is remarkable, and they negotiate obstacles or rough terrain with grace and ease. But sometimes, if you happen to be looking when the basket is taken from the head and put down, you can sense a palpable relief at the unburdening. Is that not what prayer can be? The daily unburdening of loads too great to carry?

**Song and hymn suggestions**

See you again – Wiz Khalifa ft Charlie Puth

Breathe on me, breath of God (*StF* 370)

Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart (*StF* 520)

God in my living, there in my breathing (*StF* 497)

Here as we kneel, here as we pray (*StF* 521)

Merciful Lord, in your loving kindness (*StF* 761)

Our Father in heaven (*StF* 763)

Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire (*StF* 529)

Take time to be holy (*MP* 625)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* Ask the group to name things that make it difficult to pray. Each time they name something, add something heavy to a basket or rucksack (like stones or cans). Ask a volunteer to carry it around the room. Then ask another volunteer to go round the room with them, helping them carry it. As they go around the room, the second volunteer should slowly take out stones from the bag, demonstrating that God has heard their frustrations and fears, and is inviting them to be unburdened.
* Create stations around the room where people can pray in different ways (eg some paints and a canvas; pens and blank paper to write poetry; a music player). Ask people to reflect on the experience.Encourage people to teach one another different ways to pray. Ask someone to lead a meditation, breathe prayer, silent prayer, or take turns to pray out loud in a ‘round robin’.

Other ideas can be found at [methodist.org.uk/prayer](http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer)

**Discussion questions**

* How do you pray?
* Think of your own daily, weekly or other rhythms. What is the value of such rhythms?
* Has prayer been easy or hard?
* What are the voices you hear daily? Are there ways in which you could, on a daily basis, be more attentive to God’s voice?
* How do we hear God’s voice in prayers, in other people, and in the world?
* How do we distinguish between asking God daily for our bread (what we need) and the kind of ‘shopping list prayers’ that make a mockery of what true prayer is?

**Prayer ideas**

* Practise a form of breathing prayer: breathe in thinking of a word for God. Breathe out asking for your ‘daily bread’.
* Pray The Lord’s Prayer as a group. Recite a line at a time, pausing at the end of each line and asking the group to reflect, in silence, on what this means for them today (or ask one or two people to share aloud each time). If necessary, you could ask the questions below to help prompt people in their response.

***Our father in Heaven, hallowed be your name*** *– What words or names help you praise God today?*

***Your kingdom come, your will be done*** *– What would the Kingdom of God on earth look like for you today?*

***On earth as in heaven.***

***Give us today our daily bread*** *– What is the ‘bread’ we need today (ie strength, time, energy, finances, a new job)?*

***Forgive us our sins*** *– Confess and ask for forgiveness.*

***As we forgive those who sin against us*** *– Express your forgiveness towards others; or ask for a spirit of forgiveness to come, if you cannot feel it now.*

***Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil*** *– Ask God’s protection against the things that have tempted you into different paths this week.*

***For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours*** *– Take a moment to reflect on God’s sovereignty.*

***Now and forever***

***Amen***

*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**

* Use the [Sunshine and Showers prayer course](http://www.methodist.org.uk/sunshine) in a small group (a version for individuals is coming in 2024).
* Watch a video such as [Rob Bell’s Nooma video on ‘Breathe’](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh3c45Hug4), or read a book such as Richard Rohr’s *The Naked Now* and Malcolm Guite’s poem *The Church’s Banquet*, which offers a helpful contrast between “Precise prescription, rigid regimen,” and “beauty and gratuitous abundance”. Other suggestions are available from the [Sunshine and Showers course](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/visit-every-station/pray/sunshine-and-showers/sunshine-and-showers-go-deeper/).
* Try journalling daily for a week. Record your prayers. Record where and how you tune into God’s voice.

**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

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read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Service**

The Methodist calling to ‘Service’ contains three practices: challenging injustice, serving others, and seeking the flourishing of all creation. These practices relate to how we commit to serve people and the world around us, both near and far.

**Serve**

**“We will help people in our communities and beyond”**

**Key themes**

* From the very beginning, God created us to need each other.
* When we help someone, or receive help from someone, God invites us to see God in one another (Matthew 25:40).
* All people can give and receive. And just because someone has a need, it doesn’t make them powerless to also serve and give kindness to themselves or others.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:27; James 2:14-17

**Background reflection**

A commitment to serving or helping people in our local communities and beyond has always been an essential trait of Methodism. Examples range from Methodism’s involvement in the abolition of slavery through to hundreds of foodbanks, night shelters and community centres run by Methodist people and/or located in Methodist buildings around the country.

*This would be a good time to ask a discussion question about serving our neighbours.*

A Methodist Way of Life has a natural rhythm, which has been compared to breathing: we breathe in the love of God and breathe out love of God and others. We read this in Luke 10:27 – love God and out of that, love your neighbour. As Ephesians 2:10 puts it: “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Who is our ‘neighbour’? By this, we mean more than the person who lives next door, or even the people in your local village, town or city. There is something both local and global in the biblical use of neighbour, which is captured in MWOL when we say we wish to help our communities and beyond. This might include the work of the Global Relations team in supporting Partner Churches across the world, Methodist-birthed international development charity All We Can, and partner organisation Action for Children (also founded by a Methodist minister), as well as a local foodbank or social enterprise.

It is important that we recognise the ‘we’ in this commitment. Individually we may feel powerless to change things, but between us, together, we can make a difference in our world. We can all play our parts in helping others, led by their needs rather than our

assumptions on what ‘help’ looks like. The invitation is to listen and learn the needs of our communities and our whole world, and then to put that learning to good use.

A story (*you may wish to replace it with your own*): The Sant’Egidio Community in Barcelona was established after a visit to Rome by its founders, during which they met the Sant’Egidio Community there and were struck by the simplicity of their commitment to prayer, the poor and peace. Upon deciding to set up their own community, they had a clear idea how prayer might function as a core practice in their community and had some views about how to strive for and practice peace. They soon realised, however, that they didn’t really know anyone who was poor. As a result, they went out of their way to meet, sit with and listen to some of the poorest people living in and around the city. Rather than plan ‘a project for the poor’, they sought to listen first; to get alongside and act out of a spirit of partnership and relationship.

*Ask a discussion question on learning about others.*

Like all the practices of MWOL, service can be a ‘thin place’ or ‘means of grace’. In the act of helping those in our local community and beyond, we meet God in other people and learn more about the divine. The kind of acts of hospitality described in Isaiah 58 are challenging to our very way of life. How do we invite the homeless poor into our homes? It runs counter to the message that much of Western civilisation has indoctrinated us into – a preservation of ourselves and our small family unit. Yet the promise of Isaiah 58 is incredible. For although the challenges of the first few verses in the reading are difficult, the promise God makes through the prophet is that all that has been lost and broken will be restored. We are invited to see the reward that comes with putting justice first, with seeking to be a people who put justice at the heart of all we do.

**Further notes**

* This commitment is wrapped up with another: “We will challenge injustice”. Helping people involves serving their immediate needs, but there is also a need to deal with issues that cause deprivation. Working for social justice is therefore a big part of helping people. A common metaphor is that of someone who has fallen in a river. Do you wade in to get them out, or do you travel upstream to change the circumstances that led to the fall, ensuring no one else falls in again? Of course, we need both.
* Isaiah 58:6-7 says: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice… Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house.” This continues a theme first encountered in Isaiah 1:13: “bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me”. Unlike the gods of ancient myths (like the Babylonians, Egyptians, or Greeks), our God is not a vain one sustained by our worship. Our God is one who sees worship in how we love and serve others.
* What rituals are taking up our time and resources today? Perhaps the most obvious ‘regular ritual’ for many Christian communities is coming to church on a Sunday (this may be a different time or activity for pioneer communities and others).
* ‘Servant leadership’ is a popular phrase within Christian circles. However, it is often misapplied to suggest that Christians should only serve, not lead. In Jesus, we see that servanthood is a posture of leadership, not the abdication of leadership. It is a leadership that exists to serve others, and to support the leadership of others, but which also takes action when needed.
* Helping others can involve self-sacrifice; this is something we should both embrace and be cautious about. There is a common thread in the gospel stories that Jesus was often asked to help people when he was in a rest period. We must prepare to be interrupted at inconvenient times. But while sacrificing for others can be a beautiful thing, we must also care for ourselves, and be wary of overcommitting ourselves (see the Care commitment of MWOL).

**Song and hymn suggestions**

You’ve got a friend in me – Randy Newman

Brother, sister, let me serve you (*StF* 611)

Come, now, you blessèd, eat at my table (*StF* 695)

I will speak out for those who have no voices (*StF* 702)

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love (*StF* 249)

Lord, you have come to the seashore (*StF* 558)

Send me out from here, Lord (*MP* 594)

Sent by the Lord am I (*StF* 239)

We shall make peace (*StF+)*

**Creative activity suggestions**

Before you meet, recruit some volunteers (of all ages) to go ‘above and beyond’ in serving people at your next meeting. They could take people’s coats, open the door every time someone arrives or leaves, or hand deliver drinks to seats. At a good point in the meeting, ask people how it felt to serve, and how it felt to be served.

**Discussion questions**

* How have you served your neighbours recently, as an individual or community?
* Is there a group of people in our local community or the wider world with whom you feel a particular affiliation, or a sense of anger about their plight?
* How is God inviting you to serve your neighbours? What is yours to do?
* What might be the missing piece in your commitment: prayer, peace, or poverty?
* Isaiah 58 talks of rituals of worship for the Hebrews (fasting, offerings and incense) which took the place of seeking justice. What might be your equivalents today?
* How much do you know about the social justice issues you are involved with (eg how much research do you do into the charities you support)? Is there something you could find out more about, in order to try to make a difference?
* Who have you helped recently? Who has helped you recently?
* What choices do you make about making the world a better place?
* If you are serving too much, might God be encouraging you to stop something?

**Prayer Ideas**

* In the [*Daily Cordial* podcast](https://thedailycordial.com/robbell/) (12 May 2016), the American author Rob Bell talks about the simple phrase ‘show me’. Listen to part of the podcast and invite God to ‘show me’ what is mine to do, which people may value my help, and the people who are helping me.
* What is yours to do? Who could you help today? Locally and globally? Allow time for people to reflect on ‘what is theirs to do’ to help others in their community and beyond in a tangible way. Write a commitment on the back of an MWOL postcard or add an alert on your phone. Share this with the person next to you and pray for each other.

*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**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Serve](http://methodist.org.uk/serve)
* Show your gratitude to those in the ‘service industry’ such as waiting staff, posties, grocery drivers, and delivery drivers.
* Consider volunteering for church, charity, or a local enterprise (if you’re not already).
* Consider whether God might be encouraging you to step back from any roles, for your own self-care. Could you support others in taking over these roles?
* For more on how we can be ‘with’ people in need, and that Jesus’ ministry was expressed as a kind of ‘with-ness’, see Samuel Wells’ book *The Nazareth Manifesto* (Wiley Blackwell).
* For an example of how living alongside people and learning much more about them before acting is the best, most transformative and most gospel-based way to live out this part of a Methodist Way of Life, see Shane Claiborne’s book *The Irresistible Revolution* (Zondervan) and explore how to nurture a [Church at the Margins](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/).

To find out more about partnering with our global neighbours, visit [allwecan.org.uk/partnership](http://allwecan.org.uk/partnership) and the work of the [Global Relations team](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-worldwide/global-relationships/) of the Methodist Church.

**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

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**Evangelism**

There are three different approaches to evangelism in a Methodist Way of Life: ‘Tell’ is about what we say (conversation with others), ‘Share’ is about what we do (our loving actions with individuals and communities) and ‘Live’ is about being the image of God (naturally radiating God’s love, to draw people to Jesus).

**Share**

**“We share our faith”**

**Key themes:**

* God involves us in the task of bringing love and restoration. We get to work with God (1 Corinthians 3:9).
* There are lots of ways to share our faith, not just using words, and not just on our own either. Creative activities and conversation spaces at community events (whether ones you organise, or ones you join) connect people with God’s love and provide natural, fun ways to share about faith. This might be easier at times like Christmas when people are more likely to connect with Christian themes or stories.

**Relevant Bible passages**

1 Corinthians 3:9; Colossians 4:2-6

**Background reflection**

The extract from the letter to the Colossians talks of sharing faith, but also of sharing life – it concerns behaviour as well as belief. This commitment to share is not necessarily about standing up in front of a crowd, but about sharing our faith with others, where we find ourselves, when it seems appropriate. Not about preaching *at* but sharing *with*. About sharing our story, honestly, as someone who has discovered that Christian faith makes a difference to life.

Sharing faith implies that the other person is given the opportunity to partake or not, and perhaps also to share their own experiences. Sharing faith can be a little like sharing food. When we share food with others we are respectful and mindful of their needs and preferences. A gracious host would never insist that food is eaten but would prepare and present food with care. It is intentionally offered, not just left on the side for someone to find (“have you ever tried…”) but also not forced upon people. Similarly, we share our faith rather than keeping it to ourselves, but we do so with gentleness and respect.

How many people do we meet who have ‘never tried’ faith, or perhaps been put off by past experiences? According to the words from 1 Peter, we share our faith with others who are willing to engage, who are curious to hear the reason for the hope that we have. Whether or not a person appears open to what we have to share may not be down to us. Sharing our faith is always invitational.

One reason people may have been put off is that they don’t see that the words of Christians meet our actions. So it’s important that our actions show God’s love just as much as our words. We can use creative activities and gifts to show love – undertake acts of kindness; put on or join in a community event; and much more. How we live our lives, and how we serve others, can be important ways that we share our faith. But we should be careful not to suggest a hidden, ulterior motive – that we do these things only to ‘make’ people into Christians. Instead, we can explain that we love others with an ultimate hope that they will know God’s love, but that our loving actions will remain the same regardless.

Ultimately, God is the active instigator in evangelism but God invites us into
an exciting partnership. We need to practise depending on God’s presence and power in evangelism and expecting God to work. We need to step out of our comfort zones and expect God to meet us there – this happens again and again in Scripture. People are called to do things they don’t want to do all the time, think of Moses who asks God to send somebody else. We should not allow our own feeling of inadequacy to prevent us from engaging in evangelism, God calls inadequate people all the time! God has gifted us with skills for evangelism, and will gift us with opportunities to use them. Whether you’re a good cake-baker, gardener, listener – whatever your skills – you can use them to share God’s love with others.

**Further notes**

* Sharing our faith deepens our faith; when we are in relationship with people, they can also show us God at work in our own lives as well. It’s amazing how much we can learn about God when we think we’re evangelising others! When we build relationships with others, we meet God together and are all transformed. Evangelism should not be one way, we should be prepared to meet God and be changed by these interactions.
* Both words and actions are important to share God’s love with others. After Jesus preached to a large crowd of people, he fed them with bread and fish (Matthew 14:13-21). How are we feeding people today? How are we meeting practical needs?
* To whom should we speak the love of God? Some of us may find it easier to speak with friends, others with strangers. Ultimately, it is a message for the entire world.
* As we listen to others we need to acknowledge the hard stories, the stories of hurt and of pain. What if those are sometimes our own stories, currently or in the past? What exactly do we choose to share? Our story is ours to share, and we decide when, and with whom, to share it.

* Methodists have long been persuaded that good works are a necessary outworking of Christian faith. They are necessarily works of grace, for “every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above” (James 1:17). Good works essentially provide practical evidence of the grace of God in our lives. Where good works are absent one might appropriately enquire how far God’s grace has truly been experienced.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Ain’t no mountain high enough – Marvin Gaye

Beyond these walls of worship (*StF* 547)
Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine (*StF* 548)
God who made the stars (*StF* 7)
In all I do (This is my worship) (*MP* 1307)
Lord, your Church on earth is seeking (*StF* 410)
May the God of hope go with us every day (*StF* 411)

O for a thousand tongues to sing (*StF* 364)

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim (*StF* 340)

**Creative activity suggestions**

It is claimed that the Methodist minister, the Revd D T Niles, once said that evangelism (sharing good news) is “just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread”. Sharing our faith is like sharing where we have found ‘food’; where we have found a hope that sustains us. Hide some bread (or sweets or pieces of fruit) around the room (make a note of where they are so nothing is left behind!). Send everyone on a hunt around the room – once they find a piece, they must leave it where it is, saying nothing, and come back to the group. Each person must then try to direct someone else to the food (through words, actions, or drawing a map) but without simply speaking the location. For example, if it’s under a chair, they cannot say ‘chair’ but must draw or describe it.

**Discussion questions**

* How have you shared your faith recently?
* How have other people shared their faith with you?
* What opportunities to share faith are coming up?
* What could you invite people to at your local church?
* What are the reasons why people might not be keen to ‘try’ faith? How might you engage people like this?
* What do we do as a church that helps people outside the church to see something of God’s love?
* How does your church meet practical needs for people? Do you connect that appropriately with faith?
* What would it mean to step out of your comfort zone with faith sharing?
* How might you take a small step, perhaps together with others in your church?
* What are the skills you have to share God’s love with others?

**Prayer ideas**

Pass food around – perhaps pieces of bread or cracker, or fruit like tomatoes or raspberries (as much as is possible, be aware of any dietary restrictions). Each time someone takes a piece of food, ask them to pray for either:

* an upcoming church/community opportunity to show God’s love.
* good listening ears to know how to show love and share faith with neighbours, friends or family.
* thanksgiving for someone who shared faith and love with you.
* openness to be transformed by God as we share with others.

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**Ways to respond**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Share](http://methodist.org.uk/share) and [resources for evangelism](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist/), including [Everyone an Evangelist](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist/).
* Buy and play [Conversations Against Mundanity](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/features/conversations-against-mundanity) with friends and family.
* Research events in your local community. Could you run an activity to share God’s love with others? It could be anything from a craft stall at a fair to free water refills at a music festival.
* Explore how [mission planning](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/lead-churches-into-growth/write-a-great-mission-plan/mission-planning-toolkit/) and [faith-rooted community organising](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/faith-rooted-community-organising/) might help you share God’s love as a community.
* Consider how social media can be used to share God’s love with others (see [guidance from the Methodist Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/digital-communication-guidance-for-churches/social-media/social-media-guidelines/)).

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**Evangelism**

There are three different approaches to evangelism in a Methodist Way of Life: ‘Tell’ is about what we say (conversation with others), ‘Share’ is about what we do (our loving actions with individuals and communities) and ‘Live’ is about being the image of God (naturally radiating God’s love, to draw people to Jesus).

**Tell**

**“We speak of the love of God”**

**Key themes**

* It’s natural to want to pass on good news. Evangelism is about passing on the good news of Jesus’ love for you, and it flows out of our excitement about what we have discovered.
* Your story matters. You’ve got a story to share about how God’s love has affected you, a story that might make all the difference to another person (Mark 5:19).
* Speaking should always be accompanied by listening – allowing others to tell their story and allows us to notice God in them. Evangelism is not about us talking at other people, but forming meaningful relationships with others, and sharing our stories and experiences of God together.
* Evangelism is something many Christians think is difficult and scary. But once you try, you might be pleasantly surprised by how it makes you feel. When we have faith conversation, our own faith deepens.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Psalm 89:1-2; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 3:15

**Background reflection**

Evangelism is a weighty word. A few people love it but many fear it. Some may have never heard it.

Evangelism simply means ‘sharing the good news’. We can feel a burden to have all the answers, to solve other people’s pain, but sometimes this is not possible – or wanted. We are asked instead to share God’s love. This might include facts – like explaining the Trinitarian nature of a God who is Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit. But it’s also about sharing experiences and connecting with people on an emotional and spiritual level.

We are being invited to verbalise the love of God, but our verbalisation must explain what this love is. Jesus’ love and death for us can sometimes seem distant and abstract, so it is good to illustrate it through our own experiences, telling real stories of encounters with this love. Jesus did this too, sharing parables and stories.

We may be aware of a time when God felt very close and real. These can be both good times in our lives, and very tough times. Perhaps we can share times when God’s love was poured out upon our lives now.

*Ask a discussion question about sharing stories of God’s love.*

We may also be aware of doubting this love, or being unable to feel it. A famous biblical example is David in Psalm 22:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
    Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
    and by night, but find no rest.”

Evangelism is something that all Christians are called to do. As it says in Romans, “How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Romans 10:14). Each of us has a role in speaking of God’s love – the entire congregation. It is not a special job reserved for Ministers or preachers. God calls us all, as a Body of Christ, to speak – and hopefully we want to, in the way that is right for us! As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:15).

To whom should we speak the love of God? Some of us may find it easier to speak with friends, others with strangers. Ultimately, it is a message for the entire world. When we are in relationship with people, they can also show us God at work in our own lives as well. It’s amazing how much we can learn about God when we think we’re evangelising others! When we build relationships with others, we meet God together and are all transformed. Evangelism should not be something you do *to* other people but *with* other people; we should also be prepared to meet God and be changed by these interactions.

*Ask discussion questions about how we share faith.*

Speaking on behalf of God is arguably more important than ever in a society in which there is palpable anger about structural inequalities, systemic racism, and widespread fear for the future amongst many who are in a precarious economic or social position. In 2 Timothy 4:2 we are told: “proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching”. Speaking prophetically in this way takes courage, whether it is ‘speaking truth to power’ or challenging our society and communities with truths which people would rather not hear. Telling of God’s love and challenging injustice are inextricably entwined together.

Our words need to be accompanied by actions, sharing God’s love as well as speaking of it (see the “Share”, “Live”, “Care” and “Serve” commitments). But it is not enough simply to act and never to “tell”. We – like Jesus – need to use words as we nurture relationships and speak of faith. Verbalising how we feel helps other people to capture and make that love of God their own. Our words must be authentic and honest so that God’s love touches listeners at the core and causes a strong reaction in them. When we speak of our faith, we pray that the people who hear us will notice God in our words, and as we listen to the authentic and honest stories of others, we pray that we would be open to noticing God in their words.

**Further notes**

* If we are given an opportunity to share our faith, we might choose to tell a story of how God makes a difference to us. We can share honestly how our faith helps us in the ups and downs of life, and our declaration may be as simple as saying “I felt/knew that God was with me when…” and giving an example of something we have experienced.
* If you find it hard to talk about your faith, why not begin by chatting regularly with another Christian friend about where you sense the presence of God in your lives? Use ordinary everyday language, and tell it how it really is, doubts and all! Then perhaps pray for each other, that you will each notice the opportunities to share your own faith with others, with gentleness and respect.
* It is important we challenge the tendency to equate God’s love with a trouble-free life, as this can lead to doubting God when we face trouble and at times of uncertainty. We have a certain God, who died and was raised again, and by God’s Spirit is with us always. This isn’t always easy to accept, but is important to find peace.
* There are times when, to show God’s love, we need to know when *not* to speak; when to simply walk alongside. Sometimes being present and showing love is exactly what people need (this connects with the “Live” commitment of MWOL).
* Most people don’t have a ‘road to Damascus’ moment. We should not be disheartened if our prayers seem unanswered and our conversations continue for months, years, even decades. God often works in a different time frame to us. We might just be called to prepare the soil/water the plant/nurture somebody’s journey (see [Be a travelling Companion](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discipleship-pathways-travelling-together/being-a-discipleship-leader/be-a-travelling-companion/) for more thoughts on how we accompany others on their discipleship journey).

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Never gonna give you up – Rick Astley

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing (*StF* 297)

Go to the world! (*StF* 402)

God’s spirit is in my heart (*StF* 404)

Hear the call of the kingdom (*StF* 407)

In the wonder of creation (*StF* 110)

Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast (*StF* 598) *communion*

Thuma mina (Send me, Lord) (*StF* 782)

Wake every heart (The highest and greatest) (*MP* 1363)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* Who will you spend time with, and where, in the next week? Write, draw or speak aloud some specific examples – neighbours, family members, members of a gym class, fellow students. What could you tell them of the love of God? Make some commitments of small ways you could do this. It may help to share ideas with each other as some people will find this easier to think about than others. You could write their first names or initials inside a giant heart as a reminder.
* Tell each other stories: of God’s love in your life; of God’s love in other people’s lives. Draw a timeline of the last few years of your life, how far you go back is up to you. Write on the timeline words that describe your faith during different moments, for example you might write “I was angry with God”, “God felt close then”, or “I felt God’s love and peace”. Include moments of doubt, questioning, insight, deepening. Then pair up with somebody else and tell them about your timeline.

**Discussion questions**

* Who talked to you about God as you became a Christian or grew in faith? How did it help?
* What’s your story of the difference God’s love has made in your life?
* Can you share a time when you have struggled to know God’s love,
and how you responded?
* When was the last time you told a story about God?
* Do you find it easier to talk about faith with friends or strangers? Think about why this is.
* Who do you know with whom you could share something of your faith this week?
* How do we help to create a more just and inclusive society? How might we explain that God’s love is at the heart of our vision for a new, restored society?
* What are the situations in the news that you need to talk about, or the situations in your local area where you need to make God’s love known, as an individual or a church?
* Who do you discuss faith with?
* **If we had to teach a four-year-old about who God is, what would we say?**
* Do we only share our faith when it is strong and resolute? What do we do in those periods when our faith feels shaken and shaky? Do we stop sharing honestly with those who ask us about our faith?
* Over recent years some Christians have described how they have ‘lost’ their faith, or how their faith has been ‘deconstructed’. What do you learn, or what questions do you have, in reading or listening to their stories?

**Prayer ideas**

Speak these words often used at funeral services, then ask God to bring people into your mind’s eye: “Help us to love and comfort each other in God’s love; to know when to speak and when to be silent.” Ask for guidance on how to speak, or simply be alongside, the people God brings to your mind.

*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**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Tell](http://methodist.org.uk/tell) and [resources for evangelism](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist/), including [Everyone an Evangelist](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist/).
* Talk to other Christians about your faith – it’s a good way to get started. Use the ‘beliefs’ deck in [Conversations Against Mundanity](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/9781858525242/conversations-against-mundanity) to help with this.
* Be open with your friends and family about what the good news means in your life. You could talk about a specific church project so they understand more about how you spend your time.
* Ask people their stories. This might just be: “What’s happened to you this week that’s given you hope?”
* Recruit two to three people in the congregation who can talk to ‘enquirers’, or anyone who is ‘spiritually seeking’, to meet with them and speak to them about their faith, answer their questions and bring them into community.
* [Thy Kingdom Come](https://thykingdomcome.global) is a movement that encourages prayer for just five people to come to know Jesus, and to ask God’s guidance in how to speak of God’s love with

them. God is already at work in people’s lives, but we can help them to notice God.

* Read Walter Brueggemann’s *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press) for more on speaking truth to power.

**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)**.**

**Our Calling: Worship**

The umbrella term ‘Worship’ in Our Calling has three different dimensions: as well as worship in the traditional sense, there are also prayer, and noticing God. These practices might be called ‘breathing in’ God; they are intentional in connecting us to God and inform how we live in the world.

**Worship**

**“We worship with others regularly”**

One of the themes of this service is diversity and inclusion. Therefore, we encourage you to think about how your preparations for this service could be inclusive. Think about the range of people who will feature on the stage. Consider the readability of PowerPoint slides for people with sight issues or dyslexia. Embrace conversation and interaction to include people of all ages, or with concentration difficulties. A range of resources, training and suggestions [on the Inclusive Methodist Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/) are available.

**Key themes**

* Worship is one way we respond to and celebrate God’s unbounded love of, and grace to, us.
* Worshipping with others helps to knit us into a faith community, with mission as “the natural, even inevitable, consequence” (*Called to Love* *and Praise*, 4.3.2).
* We also worship God through our everyday activities – at work, at home, and wherever we live our daily lives (Acts 2:46-47: worship over meals).
* Worship can ‘look’ different (eg music styles) but there are shared elements in Methodist churches: reading the Bible, participating in prayers, and singing songs.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Isaiah 29:13; Amos 5:21-24; Colossians 3:14-17; Revelation 4:9–11

**Background reflection**

Worship is the Christian community’s celebration of its faith in a living God. It is an exultation, a hymn of praise, a great thanksgiving, for the truth and love shown to us in Jesus Christ and made real for us by his transforming spirit. We sometimes call this ‘adoration’. When we worship, or ‘go to worship’, we do not need to ask God to be with us: God isn’t there just because we have come – we have come because God is already there and God welcomes our worship.

In responding to Our Calling as Methodist Christians, we should remember that regular worship is not only a feature of what we are called to do but is ‘a means of grace’, an activity to which God calls us so that our faith is strengthened and we become increasingly aware of God’s love. We are transformed through God’s grace. Worship should not be a passive recitation of words but an opening of ourselves to God’s power. We respond to God in heart, mind, body and soul.

*Share a story from your own experiences of adoration and transformation.*

Worship was at the centre of the practice of the Early Church but it may have looked quite different to our worship services today. Worship was a combination of time at the temple and domestic gatherings arranged around a celebration of the Last Supper. Luke tells us in Acts: “*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” (Acts 2:46).

*Opportunity for discussion: This may be a good time to ask the questions about your worship today.*

For many, worship is a daily exercise in faith (not just weekly), and regularity of worship is normative and formative in our discipleship. Historically, there are many examples of those who worship God daily: some in a monastic-type of setting such as Julian of Norwich, some burning with zeal for God’s grace such as John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Today, religious communities and a number of churches continue the tradition of daily services. People may not attend daily worship services, but is worship part of our daily lives in other ways?

This commitment refers specifically to worshipping with others. Why do we worship with others? The followers of Jesus are called to be a *community* of believers, a faithful people, and to make disciples of all nations (see Matthew 28:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10).We also worship with others in the universal Church and with “all the company of heaven”. Though there are many differences between different denominations and movements, we are united in that we follow Jesus.

This community is a diverse one. People whom God calls to worship may not be like us in a number of ways, perhaps in terms of culture, race, social class, income, sexual orientation, age, disability, even understanding of the nature of Christianity – but all are welcome.

**Further notes**

* In *Called to Love and Praise* (1999), the Methodist Church stated that worship has “a twofold intention: first, adoration and praise, and second, our transformation by the grace and power of God.”
* Practically speaking, worship usually consists of a celebration of God’s presence, a proclamation of the good news for today, and an appropriate response to God’s saving grace in our lives. Around the world this occurs in many forms, according to tradition and circumstances, including on Sunday mornings in dedicated church buildings; in homes and hidden places; in Forest Church, Messy Church, Cafe Church, Digital Church, and many other forms.
* Public worship often happens on a weekly basis, and in a church building or other special place. A service of word and sacrament was the primary type of Christian worship until the Reformation. The primacy of preaching became much more common in the Western and post-Reformation traditions including Methodism (although John Wesley still expected his members to attend services of Holy Communion in their parish church on a regular basis). Now, with increased liturgical and ecumenical cooperation, worship is again frequently a service of word and sacrament.
* Archbishop Rowan Williams, in *Being Christian* (SPCK Publishing), writing about Holy Communion, reminds us that we

are there because God invites us, and we should remember that this obliges us to see the person next to us as wanted by God. God desires that person’s company as well as our own.

* The greetings from the writer at the beginning of several epistles give us insights into the spreading community of the Early Church, for example Romans 1:7 and Ephesians 1:1. It is clear that Paul valued the leadership of women (eg Apphia, Phoebe, Euodia, Syntche, Priscilla), often naming them in his greetings. The division between slave and free person (a bedrock of Roman society) was turned on its head (see Paul’s exhortion to Philemon that he treat Onesimus “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother” (Philemon 1:16-17)).
* Changes in how we understand and refer to race, ethnicity, nationality and geography (eg the place called Ethiopia in the Bible is not the same geographic place we know by that name today!) mean that we can miss how multi-cultural and multi-ethnic both the Old and New Testament [show God’s people to be](https://sojo.net/articles/faith-action/black-presence-bible-uncovering-hidden-ones). Jesus praised the faith of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) and a Syrophoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28). The disciples lived out Jesus’ exhortation to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19). At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out to people from modern-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Libya (Acts 2:5-11). “Simeon who was called Niger” (likely a black man) is listed as a prophet and teacher (Acts 13).

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Adore you – Harry Styles

Bless the Lord, O my soul (Ten thousand reasons) (*MP* 1259, see *StF All Sing!*)

Born in song (*StF* 21/*MP* 1260)

Come all you people, come and praise your maker (*StF* 22)

In the beauty of this place (*StF+)*

Let our praise be your welcome (Here for you) (*SoF* 2407)

O worship the Lord (*StF* 34)

You call us out to praise you (*StF+)*

You’re calling us (*StF* 37)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* What sort of worship refreshes you? Encourage people to share stories of how they worship God, and of things that prevent them worshipping God. How do these stories encourage and challenge us?
* How diverse is our worshipping community, compared to the demographics of our community? It may be helpful to [look at census data](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/) on age, gender, sexuality, marital status, etc, to help people consider this question (look at the [guidance](https://digitalblog.ons.gov.uk/2022/11/02/census-maps/) on using the interactive census maps from ONS).
* Are there ways that our worship could be more inclusive? What would we have to do/stop doing to make this happen?
* How far do our own traditions and prejudices affect our form of worship?

**Discussion questions**

* How would you describe worship? Why do you come to worship?
* How does the worship of the Early Church compare to worship today? Think about different denominations and movements in the UK, and the global church. What is shared, and what changes? What can we learn from this for the future?
* What do you believe about encountering the divine? When have you felt close to God in worship recently?
* Are there ways that our worship could be more inclusive? What would we have to do/stop doing to make this happen?
* How far do our own traditions and prejudices affect our form of worship?
* Just as the worshipping ‘norm’ has changed throughout history, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated trends that have made Sunday service attendance more irregular. Do we need to fight this, or embrace the opportunity to think differently about ‘regular worship’?

**Prayer ideas**

*Prayers of adoration*

Sitting in a circle or along rows, ask each person to say one thing they love about God. It might be as simple as a single word, such as “Creator”, or a short sentence like “that God always loves me no matter what”. Alternatively, ask people to create something that shows the same thing, eg a drawing or a Lego model.

*Prayers for transformation*

Create a collage with all the different ways people would like to be transformed (or like your community to be transformed). Provide clippings of helpful images and words, such as love hearts, a workplace or neighbours. Play some soft music while people are invited to add to the collage using these images or their own drawings or words.

*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**

* Could we all go to different churches next week, and report back on our experiences? Or a mid-week service at a cathedral? How was worship similar/different? How did it help us to tune into God? What other opportunities do we have to worship as part of the universal Church? Think about ecumenical events, festivals, movements like [Thy Kingdom Come](https://www.thykingdomcome.global/).
* Explore historical changes in worshipping patterns by listening to a podcast, reading a book or watching a video on the history of the Church. Reflect on how the Church today can learn from these changes by [journalling](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/journalling/), meeting in a [small group](https://www.methodist.org.uk/conversationspaces/), or speaking with your church leadership.
* Covid-19 has sped up the development of digital, or online, church. Explore what it means to be a digital church: read the stories of the [Church of the Living Stream](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/moving-to-an-online-church/) and the [Online Recovery Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/online-recovery-church/), and how digital church can [encourage inclusion and accessibility](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/becoming-an-accessible-hybrid-church/). If you’re interested in exploring digital church for your community, find out about [evangelism in a digital world](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/evangelism-in-a-digital-world/) and [digital communication guidance](https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/digital-communication-guidance-for-churches/).
* Explore [methodist.org.uk/MWOLWorship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mwolworship), and think about some of the ideas there.
* Journal for one week on the place of worship in your daily life. How do you [notice God at work](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/noticing-god/) in your job, your family, your quiet times, your community?