



CONFIRM

NOT CONFORM

METHODIST

SESSION 13

TRADITION: OUR NECK OF THE WOODS

Published by



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TRADITION: OUR NECK OF THE WOODS

THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

In our faith, grace and love are bound up inextricably together. In the Methodist tradition, this has been particularly emphasized by the life and teachings of John Wesley. Through his writings, life experiences, and sermons, we see a person “working out his faith in fear and trembling” right before our eyes. Reading of his Aldersgate Experience reminds us that we may never know when the light of grace will shine in someone’s heart, and that it may come at the lowest time or in unexpected places in a person’s life.

In our contemporary culture, we see youth told over and over again that they must succeed, they must strive, they must be measured and found worthy. Wesley lived under this same kind of pressure. What a gift he gives in his example that in failure, in weakness, and in doubt, God reaches out and says “You are loved, not for anything you have achieved or done, but simply because you ARE.” This is a word that needs to be shared continually, with all those under pressure to succeed according to some external measure. Grace is already present in their lives, and from that our love for God and neighbor flow into action.

Life Lessons

- **Your worth is never in doubt.**
- **It is from your grounding in God’s love that you can love others.**

Life Skills:

- **Creating a compelling message**
- **Working collaboratively**
- **Working on a deadline**

PRE-SESSION CHECKLIST

Before the day of the session

- Review all the scripted and spoken parts of the session, paying particular attention to the things you should read aloud during the session. Remember, the provided text is merely a suggestion—improvise, add to it, or change it as you see fit.
- Review the timeline for this session. The timeline is a suggestion only, and you should feel free to adapt it if more time is needed for an activity or a high-energy discussion.
- Look at the YouTube channel for the UMC, which can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/user/UMCVideos/videos>, to see if there is a short video that might be useful as an illustration for your group.
- **Make sure you have the following on hand:**
 - Flip chart paper
 - Scratch paper
 - Poster board
 - Ball point pens and/or pencils
 - Felt tip and marking pens
 - Video equipment
 - Copies of *Selections from the Journals of John Wesley* (found in the Session Materials), one for each youth.
 - Copies of the *Confirm not Conform* handout for each youth (found in the Session Materials)
 - The *Rules of the Road*
 - The file box with youth file folders
 - [optional] If you are able, set up something that will allow you to show a YouTube video to the group

On the day of the session

- **Set up the space [approximately 45 minutes]**
 - Check the space you'll be using for the Gathering and other activities. Is there enough room for everyone? Enough chairs and floor space?
 - Have copies of the handouts ready to distribute.
 - [Optional] Have the YouTube video ready to show.
 - Post the service project flip chart sheet.
 - Have flip chart paper and markers available.
 - Have the file box with youth folders available.
 - Post the *Rules of the Road* where youth can refer to them.

Timeline for a Ninety-Minute Session

-0:05 – 0:05	Gathering
0:05 – 0:10	Service Project Check-in
0:10 – 0:15	Bible Passage Check-In
0:15 – 0:50	Presentation: Our Neck of the Woods
0:50 – 1:00	Discussion: Our Best Feature
1:00 – 1:25	Activity: An Ad for the Church
1:25 – 1:30	Closing Prayer

Timeline for a Sixty-Minute Session

-0:05 – 0:05	Gathering
0:05 – 0:10	Service Project Check-in
0:10 – 0:15	Bible Passage Check-In
0:15 – 0:45	Presentation: Our Neck of the Woods
0:45 – 0:55	Discussion: Our Best Feature
0:55 – 1:00	Closing Prayer

SESSION 13

GATHERING

~5 MINUTES

- Welcome youth as they arrive.
- When everyone has arrived, start the continuum activity.
- Let them know that, as in past weeks, they will respond to a few statements by moving to a spot in the room, indicating whether they strongly agree, strongly disagree, or stand somewhere in between.
- Indicate which end of the room means they strongly agree and which end means they strongly disagree.
- Then make the following statements.
 - I'm having a good day.
 - I'm in the middle of a good book.
 - I like to skip to the backs of books to find out what happens or to find the answers.
 - I hate it when people share spoilers and ruin a movie for me.
 - I close my eyes during the scary parts of movies.
 - I close my eyes during the scary parts of *Confirm not Conform* sessions.

SERVICE PROJECT CHECK-IN

~5 MINUTES

- Spend a couple of minutes checking in on the service project. Write down their answers on the flip chart paper from the previous sessions.
 - Ask if anyone has gotten more information on the charity or project.
 - Ask if there have been any developments or decisions about what they will be doing or when.
 - Ask what they need to find out or do next.
 - Ask who will be doing it.

BIBLE PASSAGE CHECK-IN

~5 MINUTES

- If there is any youth who has not yet settled on a passage to memorize, set up a time to meet individually.
- Check to make sure everyone has received the *Memorizing Your Bible Passage* handout; distribute extra copies if needed.
- Ask if anyone has come up with other memorization techniques that can be shared with the group.

[Note: If you are doing the shorter sixty-minute version of this session, you will only have thirty minutes for this presentation instead of thirty-five.]

As you prepare for this portion, keep in mind that you can be as detailed and creative with the active learning pieces as your own time permits.

- Make sure you have several pieces of flip chart paper ready before you start the presentation.
- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - Imagine that tomorrow *[assuming “tomorrow” is a school day]* you walked into your school and were told there would be a completely new grading method. From now on, everyone would start out by getting an A in everything automatically. These grades would go on your permanent transcripts, but you would still be asked to do your assignments.
 - How do you think that would work?
- Use the flip chart papers to write down youth’s ideas on why they think this *would* work, and why they think it *wouldn’t* work.
- If youth ask if students will still get an A even if they don’t do their assignments, do bad work, don’t come to class, or any other reason, say yes. Everyone gets A’s.
- If one side of the “would work/wouldn’t work” discussion gets many more answers than the other, prompt youth to think about the other side of the question. If they can’t come up with anything, don’t press for answers.
- After a couple of minutes, say:
 - Here’s a totally different scenario: Imagine that you have *always* been a straight-A student in a school that *of course* requires you to earn your grades. But this year, you started a new class, and it doesn’t matter what you do; you totally, utterly, and completely fail.
 - How would you react?
- Give youth a minute or so to respond. If someone suggests that after a failure like that, the all-A school sounds pretty good, note that this is a very good insight and move right into the next part of the presentation.
- Say:
 - The situation I just described, when a straight-A student completely bombed, is a little like what happened to John Wesley when he was a young minister.
 - [As you may know,] John Wesley is the primary founder of the Methodist Church, but he started out as a minister in the Church of England in the 1700s.
 - He went to really good schools and was always an excellent student.

- He, his brother Charles, and some other students also founded The Holy Club when he was in college.¹ People actually called members of these clubs “Methodists” as an insult because they were so methodical about church attendance, Bible study, prayer, and service to the poor.
- John Wesley became a priest when he was in his early 20s and continued to strive to be faithful in everything. He was really good at it and did everything right, reading and pondering serious books, living simply, and teaching and helping others.
- In 1735, when he was 32, he read an ad asking for a clergyman “inured to contempt of the ornaments and conveniences of life, to bodily austerities, and to serious thoughts” to come work in Georgia, one of those rough, backward British colonies in the New World. He and his brother, Charles, both decided to go.
- They traveled to the New World and started their new jobs. And everyone hated them. John Wesley asked one man why he giving them the cold shoulder.

- *Ask for a volunteer to read the Journal Entry from June 22, 1736:*

He answered, “I like nothing you do. All your sermons are satires upon particular persons, therefore I will never hear you more; and all the people are of my mind; for we won’t hear ourselves abused.

“Besides, they say, they are Protestants. But as for you, they cannot tell what religion you are of. They never heard of such a religion before. They do not know what to make of it. And then your private behaviour: all the quarrels that have been here since you came, have been ‘long of you. Indeed there is neither man nor woman in the town who minds a word you say. And so you may preach long enough; but nobody will come to hear you.”

- The “Holy Club” brothers lasted a couple of years, and then went back to England in 1738.
- Not only did John Wesley feel he’d failed in his work, he realized he had never really obtained freedom from sin because he always kept trying to earn it through good works.
- He kept preaching and teaching, but he wondered if he should because he felt he had no faith.
- Back when they were on their way over to the New World, the Wesley brothers had met members of another denomination called the Moravian Church and became friends with them.
- One Moravian friend in particular, named Peter Bohler, encouraged John to keep preaching. He wrote about this in his journal.
 - *Ask for a volunteer to read the Journal Entry from March 4, 1738:*

¹ We have to admit, by calling this group The Holy Club, we think he was just asking for it.

Immediately it struck into my mind, “Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?” I asked Bohler whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, “By no means.” I asked, “But what can I preach?” He said, “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.”

- Bohler and other Moravian friends also encouraged Wesley to go to a Moravian Society meeting when he got back to England.
- On May 24, 1738, he wrote about this in his journal.
 - *Ask someone to read this passage:*

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

- This “Aldersgate Experience” was a turning point for Wesley—and for who we are as Methodists.
 - From that moment, Wesley’s understanding of grace changed. He understood at a fundamental level that God had already given him—and everyone—an A grade, but that it didn’t mean his work was finished. But he didn’t need to keep working because he was afraid God would flunk him. Instead, he finally understood the message of grace, as Paul writes in the letter to the Ephesians:
- Read the following passage, or ask for a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:8-10:

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

- John Wesley’s conversion experience shaped two of the most basic beliefs we hold as Methodists.
 - The first one is ominously called **Christian Perfection**.
- Write *Christian Perfection* on a piece of flip chart paper.
- Ask for two youth to help with the next section.²

² If you have a large group, you may want to have two youth write and cross out each line.

- Give each youth a marker.
- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - Perfection may not mean what we think it means. John Wesley was very clear about what perfection was and was not.³
 - Is perfection about *knowing everything*?
 - *Have one youth write “knowing everything” on the flip chart paper.*
 - **No!** Wesley said people can know a lot, but they are never going to be able to know everything, and in particular people are not going to be able to know everything about God.
 - *Have the other youth put a big line through it, crossing it out.*
 - So does perfection mean *never making a mistake*?
 - *Have one youth write “never make mistakes” on the flip chart paper.*
 - **No!** Since we don’t know everything (see above), we are bound to make mistakes.
 - *Have the other youth cross out “never make mistakes.”*
 - Does perfection mean *having a good life*, without ever getting sick or being weak or having something go wrong?
 - *Have one youth write “have a good life.”*
 - **No!** Wesley says that infirmities, whether they’re due to sickness or other circumstances, are not a sign that you are unfaithful.
 - *Have the other youth cross out that line.*
 - Is perfection *being free from temptation*? If you are perfect does it mean you are never tempted?
 - *Have one youth write “never tempted.”*
 - **No!** Wesley points out that Jesus was tempted to the very end of his life.
 - *Have the other youth cross it out.*
 - Instead, Christian Perfection for Wesley is summed up in one word.⁴
- Ask if there are any guesses.
 - The word is *love*.
 - *Have one youth write “love.”*
 - Here’s how Wesley put it:

The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:” Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” These contain the whole of Christian perfection.

³ *Sermon 40: Christian Perfection* by John Wesley. Text at <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-40-Christian-Perfection>

⁴ *Sermon 76: On Perfection* by John Wesley. Text at <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-76-On-Perfection>

- *Have the other youth underline it, put a circle around it, put a star by it, and make it stand out.*
- Thank the youth who have been assisting and have them sit down.
- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - This understanding of Christian Perfection informs the second belief we hold as Methodists, which we call **Practical Divinity**.
- Write *Practical Divinity* on the flip chart paper.
 - What this means is that what is important to us is not merely *being* a Christian, but *living out* our Christian faith in our love for God and for our neighbors, putting faith and love into action.
 - What are some ways we do Practical Divinity?
- Write down their answers on the flip chart paper.
- You may want to encourage them to think about the larger church and its global ministries. What does the Methodist Church do in other parts of the world? But first give them a chance to see what they come up with.
- If you have time, you may wish to show a video from the UMCVideos YouTube channel. <http://www.youtube.com/user/UMCVideos/videos>
- Or simply move on to the next activity.

DISCUSSION: OUR BEST FEATURE

~10 MINUTES

[Note: If you are doing the full ninety-minute version of this session, your group will have ten minutes for this discussion followed by additional time to create and present some ads for the denomination. But if you've only got an hour, do the discussion for ten minutes and then skip ahead to the closing prayer without actually making the ads or any videos. You might encourage the youth to do that as a homework assignment, if you wish.]

If at all possible, we highly recommend that you create videos of the advertisements created by the youth and post them to YouTube, to be shared on your church's website, Facebook page, etc. For privacy reasons, leave names off of the videos and descriptions, but use this opportunity for youth to share their message about their church to the church and beyond.

- Inform the youth that they will be using the information they just learned to create an ad for their church.
- Let them know they will have 10 minutes to work as a larger group to come up with their concepts for an ad campaign and (if you are doing the 90-minute version of this session) another 15 minutes to work out the details.
- [If you have a larger group, quickly break them into groups of 3 or 4.]
- For the last 10 minutes, you will be filming their ad.
- Invite them to jot down ideas as they come to mind.
- Distribute scratch paper and ballpoint pens and/or pencils.

- Have a marker and flip chart paper ready to write down their ideas.
- Then begin the following brief discussion:

Discussion Question	Potential Follow-up Questions	Facilitator Notes
What's your favorite thing you heard today about the United Methodist Church?	What's one thing that sticks in your mind?	<i>Write these down. Don't worry if it's all over the map. But also pay attention to what they say; what's most important to them and what they think is attractive or memorable may surprise you.</i>
What do you think would make the Methodist Church attractive to people who don't know about it?	What do you think people ought to know about our church?	<i>Again, write these down. They may bring up something that is specific to your congregation; write that down too. After all the ideas have been written, you may want to point out that not all congregations have/do this thing, but that it might be a good point to make about your specific church.</i>
If you could tell someone only one thing about the United Methodist Church, what would it be?		<i>There will undoubtedly be more than one "one thing" that people want to share. Make a note if more than one person agrees on that "one thing."</i>
What do you think would be a good slogan to get that idea across?	Fill in the blank: the United Methodist Church is ____	<i>Allow for crazy brainstorming; this doesn't have to be the fill-in-the-blank response.</i>

- Then if you are doing the full ninety-minute version of this session, give the following instructions, using your own words or these:
 - Over the next 15 minutes, come up with a way to present your key message as an advertisement for the United Methodist Church .
 - Keep it short and focus on one main concept you want to get across.
 - You don't have to say the concept in words as long as you find a way to convey the point.
 - You can use drama or simply present the information.
 - You can use any props you can find around or create signs using poster board.
 - I'll give you a warning when you have five minutes left so you can run through your ad a couple of times.
 - Remember, you only have 15 minutes total to put this together, so keep it simple.
- Then let them work on the activity.

ACTIVITY: AN AD FOR THE CHURCH**~15 MINUTES**

[Note: If you are doing the sixty-minute version of this session, skip ahead to the closing prayer.]

- As mentioned above, give youth 10 minutes to work on developing their ad.
- If they ask for a specific prop or item, offer to help; otherwise, let them figure things out. Don't solve things for them.
- At the 5 minute mark, let them know they have 5 minutes to run through their ad before filming.
- At the 10 minute mark (or thereabouts), invite the group to come back together to film their ad.
- If you have time, you might want to give youth more than one take.
- Let them review what they've done.
- Inform them about your next steps, such as if you plan to post the videos to YouTube or elsewhere online. If you don't plan to post them, still try to find a way to share the work they've done with them by the next session.
- Thank them for their work and creativity.
- Then gather for the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER**~5 MINUTES**

As you end, you may want to ask some of the students to say their own prayers. Another option may be to end with the following prayer:

“Do all the good you can. With all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.”
— John Wesley

POST-SESSION REVIEW

At some point before your next session, meet as a team (if there is a team) or on your own and spend a few minutes reviewing what went well and what could be changed. Some things to consider:

- Overall, how did this session go?
- How much progress (if any) have the youth made in planning their service project? Are they clear on what they need to do next?
- Has everyone selected a Bible passage to memorize? Are they clear on what to do next?
- What did the youth say was most important to them about their tradition?
- What's most important to *you* about your tradition?
- How did youth work together during the Ad for the Church activity? Do you need to make any adjustments to account for current group dynamics?
- How will you share the videos/ads you made during this session?
- If you were doing this session again, what would you do differently?
- What did you learn from leading this session?
- What affected you personally? What questions did this session raise for you? How will you address them?

For the Scripture memorization passages:

- Check over any more passages that youth have handed in. Make a personal call or meet with each youth to ask why s/he chose this passage. If you feel the youth has a good grasp on the passage, what it means, and its significance to her/himself, encourage the youth to get started memorizing. If you feel the youth could dig a little deeper into the passage, engage him/her in a discussion about it.
- Make a copy of the chosen passages for your files and send the original back to the youth.
- Call any youth who have not turned in a passage to memorize and remind them to get that to you by the date you set. Offer help if needed.
- Once you receive their passages, follow up with them as described above.

As you plan ahead:

- What needs to be done in advance of the meeting with the church council?
- What needs to be done in advance of the service project?
- What needs to be done in advance of the confirmation service?
- What needs to be done in advance of the *iConfirm* service?

Break these down into small, manageable pieces to help you get through them!

Be sure to take a look at the next session. Figure out:

- What needs to happen by then?
- What materials do you need to gather or purchase?
- Who will do these things?
- When will they be done?

SESSION MATERIALS

MEMORIZING YOUR BIBLE PASSAGE

Different people will find that different methods will help them memorize more effectively. Use as many of the following techniques as you wish to help you memorize your Bible passage. Or come up with your own. Do whatever works best for you.

FOR UNDERSTANDING

- 1) Read the entire book in which your passage is found.
- 2) Without looking at the passage, write out a summary of what the passage is saying.
- 3) Outline your passage.
- 4) Make flashcards using only key words from the passage.
- 5) Without looking at the passage, tell it to someone in your own words.

VISUAL TECHNIQUES

- 1) Create flash cards that contain key words or visual images/pictograms from your passage.
- 2) Create a PowerPoint slide show of your passage, using words, but also images and colors that the words evoke for you.
- 3) Write down the passage using only the first letters of each word in the passage (e.g., I t b w t W a t W w w G a t W w G [*John 1:1*]). Use this sheet of initials to recite your passage. If you get lost, look ahead a few letters to see if you can figure out where the passage is going and try again.

AUDIBLE/SOUND TECHNIQUES

- 1) Have someone else read the passage aloud to you (without looking at it yourself).
- 2) Say only the vowel sounds of the passage.
- 3) Sing your passage.
- 4) Close your eyes and say as many words from the passage that you can recall, not worrying about order or sense (e.g. God, beginning, Word, has, glory, been).
- 5) Record yourself reciting your passage and listen to it as you do other things.
- 6) If your passage has been set to music, listen to recordings of it (but be aware that many compositions use the King James Version).

PHYSICAL/ACTIVE TECHNIQUES

- 1) Write out the passage in longhand, organizing it into paragraphs that make sense to you, as opposed to what the passage looks like in the Bible.
- 2) Make a passage puzzle. Write out your passage on index cards in 3, 4, or 5 word chunks; shuffle them and then try to put them in order without consulting your Bible.
- 3) Clap or tap out the rhythm of your passage as you read it aloud; then clap or tap out the rhythm as you read it silently.
- 4) Read your passage (or have it read to you) while you are moving. Pump your fist or make some other gesture when you reach a word that has emphasis.
- 5) Bounce a tennis ball as you read or recite your passage.

OTHER METHODS THAT WORK FOR ME:

June 22, 1736

He answered, “I like nothing you do. All your sermons are satires upon particular persons, therefore I will never hear you more; and all the people are of my mind; for we won’t hear ourselves abused.

“Besides, they say, they are Protestants. But as for you, they cannot tell what religion you are of. They never heard of such a religion before. They do not know what to make of it. And then your private behaviour: all the quarrels that have been here since you came, have been ‘long of you. Indeed there is neither man nor woman in the town who minds a word you say. And so you may preach long enough; but nobody will come to hear you.”

March 4, 1738

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May 24, 1738

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If you are interested in reading more of John Wesley’s journals, you can find them online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal>.