



Embracing an Adverbial Faith

BISHOPS' VISION STATEMENT WORSHIP SERIES

Planning Notes • Preaching Notes • Music Resources • Liturgical Resources
Offertory Prayers • Children's Messages • Youth Messages • Small Groups

The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2025, the bishops of the United Methodist Church released a vision statement designed to help the church live into the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. They built this statement around the themes of loving, serving, and leading. The invitation comes, however, not simply through the words, but in the way they are described. We are not just called to love, but to love boldly. We don't just hear a call to serve, but to serve joyfully. And we aren't seeking those who will just lead, but those who will lead courageously. The adverbs add a spark to the statement. We invite you to consider this statement in your church. There are, of course, many ways to do that. We offer this simple worship series built around these adverbial invitations. It is our hope that with some reflection and attention, we can be inspired to embrace [an adverbial faith.

If six weeks seems too long, you can adapt these resources to fit your schedule. You could craft a three-week series focusing on the three adverbs the Bishops highlight, with a brief introduction from Week 2 resources where the idea of living adverbially is presented. Or you can see how it could easily become either a 4-week or 5-week series depending on how you arrange the different themes. However you arrange it, we encourage that your congregation explore this powerful statement from our Bishops and reclaim the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

During this first week, the focus centers around discipleship rooted in Jesus Christ. We may find it is easy to say we are followers of Jesus Christ, but we follow *to become like* Jesus. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:15, “we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...” As Wesleyans, we understand this growth as part of sanctifying grace, the Holy Spirit’s ongoing presence and work that—with our cooperation—forms us to be more and more like Christ. Our discipleship doesn’t happen just on Sundays; it happens every day!

As you begin planning worship for this series, consider how you can engage the gathered body in a multisensory encounter with what it means to live an adverbial faith throughout the whole series. What song or songs might guide you through this series? Is there a heart song that is especially meaningful to your congregation that you can include each week? Perhaps you will want to find a new hymn to introduce and build on throughout the series, helping it become a new heart song by the end of these six weeks. Some hymns readily lend themselves to changing or adding words that are appropriate for a particular service or series. For instance, you might draw on a repetitious song like “Guide My Feet,” but add a verse each week like: “Guide our feet to love boldly (x3)/For we do want to love boldly,” “Guide our hands to serve joyfully (x3)/For we do want to serve joyfully,” “Guide our hearts to lead courageously (x3)/For we do want to lead courageously.”

Finally, consider what embodied rituals you can sustain throughout the series. You might decide to celebrate Holy Communion every week, or you might consider including a reaffirmation of baptism in week five or six. Depending on the size of your congregation, you could build in a ritual of reflection in which you provide Post-It notes and invite people each week to write one thing they are taking with them into the week ahead. Invite them to place the Post-It notes on the altar or on a posterboard during worship. Use your imagination to create opportunities for people to hear, see, and *fully embody* the proclamation of the Word and the call to live an adverbial faith.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Take time to explore the website for The Endowment for Theological Education (www.endowftecc.org). Where do you notice God at work? How might God be calling you to pay attention and get involved?

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

“Put out into the deep water...” (*Luke 5:4 NRSV*) That’s the introduction into discipleship that Jesus issues to Simon. Let’s go deep. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to not be satisfied with the surface, with the shallows. It is to acknowledge that a faith that isn’t willing or able to dive into the deep issues, the deep problems, the deep situations of living in a complicated world, isn’t the faith that Jesus calls us to embrace.

Paul strikes a similar note in our text from Ephesians: “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine...” (*Ephesians 4:14 NRSV*) From there he goes into even deeper waters as he encourages Jesus followers to speak the truth in love. Which is both risky and involved. Speaking the truth in a truth-adverse world is dangerous in so many ways. But speaking truth in love means that we have to be invested in the hearer as much as in the truth we speak. Or that we speak truth to bring reconciliation and not condemnation. We speak truth to bring healing and not to further wound. And the truth we speak is not our truth, but from the one who is the truth and the life.

That’s the joy of being a disciple. From the beginning we are not alone. We are not left to make our way into the deep water of our lives or the lives of those around us on our own. The Christ who calls us goes with us. He is there in the boat, he is there when the nets are cast, and when the truth is told. And we live into that truth, into the presence. Christ is the head, says Paul in Ephesians. And we are growing into that head, into his likeness. We are obedient to that truth, to that law of living, not because it is a law, but because it is him.

This is tricky, we must admit. The law the psalmist celebrates, the source of our ultimate joy, is not some codified text of laws and statutes, but is the Christ we follow in ways we can understand and follow day by day. We incarnate the Christ when we follow the law, when we align our lives with his life, when we are obedient to the vision of who he was and who he is. We incarnate the kingdom that he described. We incarnate the kingdom when we live together in relationship with Christ and with one another as we grow into the head that is Jesus the Christ.

We grow. That’s an important truth that is revealed in the text. We grow, we are in process, even as we speak the truth in love. Even as we walk in his ways—and stumble now and then—because we are growing into the head, into what Christ calls us to be and to do. We don’t wait for completion before we speak. We don’t wait until we’ve got it perfectly, until we understand it all. We go and we do. We love and we serve and we lead, even as we are growing.

There are, of course, many ways of being a disciple. The Ephesians text lists some of them, the roles of the follower. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but examples of leadership. And a reminder that these roles are for building up. We need leaders to create community, to invite and include and inspire all the saints—all the disciples on the path, growing into the head that is Jesus the Christ. And to do it all with joy.

The joy the psalmist speaks of is more than simple obedience to the vision of the life of a disciple. It is in the living it out. It is in the doing and being. It is in the community with whom we do and be. We may learn by going through the motions. By imitating, by following a pattern or a practice. But there is more to being a disciple than going through the motions. There is something deeper, something riskier, something more satisfying, to the discipleship path. And that is passion. Or as we’re calling it, it is an adverbial faith. But more on that next week.

For now, with the psalmist, we celebrate the gift of following the one who calls us into discipleship. We acknowledge that we are still growing, yet we are called to speak the truth in love and invite others to join us on the discipleship journey.

WEEK 1 | Disciples Formed by Jesus Christ

MUSIC RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1-8, Ephesians 4:11-16, Luke 5:1-11

THEME: *Responding to Jesus' call by allowing our lives to be shaped, matured, and formed for faithful discipleship.*

Traditional Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal, UMH)

- Jesus Calls Us (UMH 398)
- Here I Am, Lord (UMH 593)
- Take My Life, and Let It Be (UMH 399)
- I Surrender All (UMH 354)
- Lord, Speak to Me (UMH 463)
- O Jesus, I Have Promised (UMH 396)

The Faith We Sing (TFWS) / United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)

- The Summons (TFWS 2130)
- Lord, I Want to Be a Christian (UMH 402)
- Holy Spirit, Truth Divine (UMH 465)

African American / Gospel

- I Have Decided to Follow Jesus (TFWS 2129)
- Over My Head, I Hear Music in the Air (SOZ 167)
- We've Come This Far by Faith (SOZ 192)
- I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (UMH 521)

Global Songs

- Jesus, We Are Here / Jesu Tawa Pano (TFWS 2273) – Zimbabwe
- Come, All You People / Uyai Mose (TFWS 2274) – Zimbabwe
- O-So-So / Come Now, O Prince of Peace (TFWS 2232) – Korea

Songs from Songs of Zion (SOZ)

- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross (SOZ 19)
- We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder (SOZ 205)

Modern Worship (CCLI)

- Oceans (Where Feet May Fail) – Hillsong UNITED
- I Will Follow – Chris Tomlin
- Take My Life – Chris Tomlin
- Awake My Soul – Hillsong Worship
- Christ Be All Around Me – All Sons & Daughters

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of God, like Peter, James, and John, Jesus calls to us from the shorelines and the sidelines of life. Will you leave everything behind and follow?

Yes, we will follow!

Jesus calls us to work together, to build up the Body of Christ as we mature in faith. Will you leave everything behind and follow?

Yes, we will follow!

Jesus calls us to grow, to become disciples formed in the likeness of Christ. Will you leave everything behind and follow?

Yes, we will follow!

Family of God, on this journey of faith, we are not alone—God is with us!

Today, we choose once again to leave everything behind and follow Christ, who forms us as disciples, that we may live as disciples who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God,
who surrounds us with grace,
help us know your presence and receive your guidance today, that through our gathered worship, we might continue to build up the Body of Christ as we grow in maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of unity and love,
place within each of us
a spirit of hope and community.
Have mercy upon us
when we speak without love
or act without humility.
Cleanse us with the living water of your grace.
Create in us willing hearts
to live in patience and gentleness.
Raise us up to be your children,
growing toward maturity
in faith and love.
Strengthen this church,
that we may be a model
of ministry and unity
for all the world to see.

Silent prayers of confession.

Receive this good news:
God, who calls us to build up the Body of Christ,
Pardons our sins and frees us to grow
in unity and maturity through grace.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
Glory to God! Amen.**

*Adapted from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009,
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<http://www.ministrymatters.com>.*

BENEDICTION

May God, who forms you in the image of Christ, bless you with the perseverance to answer Christ's call each day as you leave behind everything that holds you back and say "yes" to living as disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

WEEK 1 | Disciples Formed by Jesus Christ

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

Calling Christ, you invite us away from the shallows into deep water, where trust replaces certainty, and obedience becomes joy. As we offer these gifts, we remember that discipleship is more than surface faith; it is a willingness to follow you into risk, truth, and love. Take what we bring and shape it for your purposes: to mend nets, to speak truth with compassion, and to build a community that grows into your likeness. Be with us in the boat and on the journey, as we learn, stumble, and grow. Use these offerings to draw others into the deep, life giving grace of your kin-dom. Amen. (Luke 5:1–11)

WEEK 1 | Disciples Formed by Jesus Christ

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

Props: Footprint cutouts or taped path; small toy fishing net or basket; small “seed” items (like paper seeds or bean pods)

Message:

Good morning, friends! Today, we are going to talk about growing in Christ. That means learning about Jesus and getting stronger in our hearts and in our actions.

I brought some fun things today! First, look at this path on the floor. Who thinks they can walk along it without stepping off? Let's try!

(Let a few children walk along the path or footprints.)

Wonderful job! What helped you stay on the path? *(Pause for answers such as looking carefully, balancing, taking your time.)* Yes! Walking along the path slowly and carefully is like growing in Christ; it takes practice, patience, and paying attention.

In today's Bible verse from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 5, Jesus saw some fishermen who had been working all night and hadn't caught anything. He told them to try again. Even though they were tired, they listened to Jesus, and guess what? They caught so many fish that their nets were almost breaking!

Just like the fishermen had to grow in patience and trust to follow Jesus, we grow in Christ by listening, learning, and practicing kindness and love every day.

Psalm 119 also tells us that God shows us the path of life. God wants to help us grow in understanding and in making good choices.

Finally, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, we learn that Jesus gives gifts to people. A gift from God is something special inside you that helps you love, help, or make the world better. It's not a toy or candy that you get on your birthday; instead, it's something you can do with your hands, your heart, or your words. Examples of a gift from God can include:

- A gift from God can be **helping someone feel happy** when they are sad.
- It can be **listening carefully** to a friend or family member.
- It can be **drawing a picture** or **sharing something with someone** to make them smile.
- It can be **telling the truth**, **giving a hug**, or **praying for someone**.

Birthday gifts are things you receive to enjoy, like a toy, a book, or a treat.

Gifts from God are things you can give to others to help and love them, like kindness, patience, and bravery.

Remember, birthday gifts are for you to enjoy. Gifts from God are for you to share! When we use our gifts and follow Jesus, we help one another grow, too.

Now let's do something fun. Pretend these little “seeds” are our hearts. Hold your seed in your hand. What happens when a seed grows? *(Pause for answers: it sprouts, gets taller, grows strong.)* That's just like us! When we follow Jesus and listen to God, we grow in love, faith, and joy.

Let's all pretend to plant our seeds. Wiggle your fingers into the “soil,” cover your seed, and then stand tall like a growing plant. Do you feel yourself getting stronger in Christ?

Today, we are talking about **growing**. Can you say it with me? **Growing!**

Growing in Christ means:

- Learning more about Jesus every day.
- Using our gifts to help others. Remember, birthday gifts are for you to enjoy. Gifts from God are for you to share!
- Practicing kindness, patience, and love.
- Listening to God and following Jesus' path.

Let's walk our path again slowly, imagining we are growing step by step in Jesus' love.

Say together: "I will grow in Christ every day!"

Blessing/Prayer:

Open your hands like you're ready to receive a gift.

May the Holy Spirit guide you to love boldly.

May the example of Christ inspire you to serve joyfully.

May the strength of God's love help you grow in Christ.

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Grow in Christ.

Amen.

Between the Sundays: Family Conversation Starters and Activities

These questions and activities are designed to help families talk, play, and pray together during the week. They connect with the children's message shared on Sunday and help reinforce faith learning at home. Use them at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime — anytime your family is together.

They are simple, short, and open-ended, so children can respond in their own ways.

These conversations help grow faith in everyday moments and remind families that following Jesus happens all week long — not just on Sundays.

Theme: We grow in Christ.

Conversation Starters:

- What did you learn about Jesus today?
- What does it mean to grow in Christ?
- How do you see God helping you grow?
- What's one thing you can do this week to grow closer to Jesus?

Family Activities:

1. Measure Your Growth

Stand your child against a wall and mark their height with tape or pencil.

Talk about how bodies grow little by little, and hearts grow, too.

Ask:

- "What helps your body grow?"
- "What helps your heart grow in Jesus?" (prayer, kindness, learning, love)

Say together: "Jesus helps us grow every day."

2. Net Full of Blessings

Use a small basket, bowl, or a pretend fishing net.

Throughout the week, add slips of paper with drawings or words that show how your family noticed God at work (*helping, learning, listening, forgiving*).

At the end of the week, look at the "full net" and say: "Look how much God helped us grow!"

3. Growing-in-Christ Routine Chart

Create a simple chart with pictures or words like:

- Pray.
- Be kind.
- Help others.
- Listen.
- Learn.

Each day, let your child place a sticker next to one way they practiced growing in Christ.

Talk about how growth happens a little at a time, just like learning something new.

Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, thank you for loving us first. Help our family love others boldly, just as you do. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

Note to the Teacher:

The key phrase for this lesson is “[...] they are longing for a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” The lesson is that a negative emotion or rejection cannot motivate as effectively as a larger vision can. You can’t sustain a passion based on discontent. You need something more, something that builds up, something that drives, something that encourages.

The icebreaker encourages the youth to follow a simple motion pattern and to note disruptions in it. The discussion encourages them to reflect on how people become disciples. The activity invites them to participate in a growth line to examine their growth in discipleship.

Supplies Needed:

- Open space large enough for students to move.
- Optional masking tape to mark the ends of the line.

Icebreaker (10 min): “Follow the Pattern”

Have everyone stand in a loose circle. The leader begins a simple motion pattern, such as clap, snap, or stomp. The person to the right repeats the pattern, and the pattern continues until it returns to the leader. If they don’t get it right, the motion pattern restarts with the first student. Each time it comes back to the leader, that person silently (and maybe just slightly) changes the pattern, and it continues. The group’s job is to notice the change and adjust without being told. After a minute, pause and briefly ask what it felt like to realize something had changed and to try to keep following.

Keep in mind the different physical and cognitive abilities of the students within your group, and make sure your motion pattern allows everyone to participate.

Bible Reading (5 min): Luke 5:1–11

Discussion Questions (10 min):

- What details from this story do you remember most clearly?
- What do we learn about Simon Peter and the others before Jesus asks anything of them?
- Why do you think Peter chooses to try what Jesus suggests, even though he is unsure?
- What changes for Peter and the others by the end of the story?
- What do you think this story suggests about how people become disciples over time?
- What might it look like for someone your age to grow into being more like Jesus over time? Are there things we tend to gain or lose as we become more like Jesus?

Active Learning Activity (20 min): “Growth Line”

Create a long, open space in the room. Explain that one end of the space represents “Just starting out” and the other represents “Feeling confident and steady.” Read a series of prompts one at a time (see examples below) and invite students to silently stand along the line where it feels true for them. Emphasize that movement along the line is expected and that discipleship is about growth, not perfection.

Once you have done several of the prompts, take a moment to reflect as a group:

1. What did you notice about where you stood on the line compared to where others stood? What was that like for you?
2. Did any prompt make you want to move closer to one end than you expected, and what do you think that reveals about where you are right now?
3. How does seeing growth as something you move through over time change the way you think about following Jesus?

Examples of prompts:

- Trying something new, even when I am not confident, I will succeed
- Listening to guidance from an adult or mentor
- Trusting my own instincts when making decisions
- Sticking with something when it gets frustrating or boring
- Paying attention to how my actions affect other people
- Showing patience with myself when I mess up
- Being open to changing my mind about something important
- Practicing faith or spirituality outside of church or youth group
- Taking responsibility when I make a mistake
- Feeling like I am still figuring things out
- Doing what feels right even when it is unpopular
- Asking for help instead of handling everything alone
- Letting myself grow at my own pace
- Trying to live out kindness or compassion during the week
- Trusting that growth takes time

Prayer (5 min): Close the session in a manner traditional to or appropriate for your group.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:1–8, Ephesians 4:11–16, Luke 5:1–11

Fellowship (10+ min): Snacks or a Meal

Gathering Time (5–10 min):

Divide participants into groups of two or three, and ask, “What are two or three things a ‘disciple’ does? If you consider yourself to be a disciple of Jesus, when do you think you first started following him?”

Group Dialogue (30 min):

Read the texts before responding to the questions below.

Read Luke 5:1–11.

Jesus calls his first disciples.

- What do you notice about Jesus’ actions in this story? How do the “soon-to-be” disciples respond?
- Jesus instructs Simon to “put out into the deep water...” (Luke 5:4 NRSVUE). That could be a metaphor for being willing to engage with “deeper,” more challenging aspects of life. How do you see your church going into “deeper waters” in your life?
- Consider your personal life. Have you sensed Jesus’ invitation to go into “deeper waters”? How do you understand that invitation?

Read Ephesians 4:11–16.

Look closely at the first two verses of this text.

- What five spiritual roles are named that were “granted” by Christ “himself”? [Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.]
- What does this passage indicate is the reason these gifts are given? [“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”]
- What do you think is special about these five gifts? Have you seen them in action in your church?
- One aspect of growing to “maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (v. 13) is to “speak the truth in love.” Why do you think this is important? When have you seen that or done it yourself well?

Read Psalm 119.

- What emotions do you see expressed in this passage? What prompts that emotion for the author?
- How could you connect this psalm with growing as a disciple?

The Preaching Note for this week says,

That’s the joy of being a disciple. From the beginning, we are not alone. We are not left to make our way into the deep water of our lives or the lives of those around us on our own. The Christ who calls us goes with us. He is there in the boat; he is there when the nets are cast, and when the truth is told. And we live into that truth, into the presence.

- How do you understand God’s presence being with you in the “deep waters” of your life?

Just One Thing:

What is one thing you could do in the week ahead to grow as a disciple of Jesus?

Going Deeper on Your Own:

This week, consider studying one of the selected texts in the following pattern:

- Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to the scripture (Psalm 119:18).
- Read the text (Psalm 119, Luke 5:1–11, or Ephesians 4:11–16) out loud.
- What do you notice about the text?
- What questions arise?
- What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?

Prayer (10 min):

Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 min):

End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

O God, we humbly confess that we don't always understand your call in our lives. Help us say yes to following you, Jesus, in all your ways. Spirit, lead and guide us to grow to maturity, speaking your truth in love. Open our hearts and minds and shape our wills to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as we learn to walk more faithfully in your presence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

Adverbial faith. What does it mean? As we discussed last week, this is a series about living our faith as disciples on the way, growing as we follow the way of Jesus Christ together. Boldly, joyfully, courageously—these are words we can do something with in worship! The adverbs give us direction, character, meaning. They distinguish the kind of love, service, and leadership that the Holy Spirit empowers us to do from the love, service, and leadership that our world values. While it may be tempting to emphasize the contrast between the world and Christ, we encourage you to take a different approach. In this second week of “Embracing an Adverbial Faith,” forget the contrasts; focus on the reality. What does living adverbially look, smell, sound, taste, and feel like? What is the shape of the community we build when we live as adverbial followers of Christ? What does God tell us about this bold, joyful, and courageous journey we are on together?

Consider how the story of your congregation demonstrates the Holy Spirit’s work among you. What events formed you? What are the moments, the songs, the scriptures that you hear or sing or remember that you can point to and say, “*That is who we are!*”? This is a Sunday to recall those stories and songs, to remember together how far God has brought us as we commit again to journeying the path of discipleship together.

In addition, what are the stories and songs that connect your congregation with the worldwide United Methodist Church? As we move toward Miracle Sunday, take this opportunity to share the life and witness of United Methodists around the globe. Perhaps you sing “Wa Wa Wa Emimimo (Come, O Holy Spirit, Come; *The Faith We Sing* 2124.) and [tell the story of Patrick Matsikeniyiri](#). If you celebrate Holy Communion, share the story of [Villar United Methodist Church of the Zambales District of the West Middle Philippines Annual Conference](#) and its contextualized approach to Holy Communion. When we live as disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit, we do not do so in a vacuum. We live as part of the body of Christ in all times and places, languages, and traditions. As we lift our voices in song or share the stories of our siblings around the world, we strengthen our ties to the worldwide church and open ourselves to be formed as disciples by the witness of the Holy Spirit at work throughout the body of Christ.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Set aside a few minutes each day this week to pray for United Methodist clergy and lay leaders from around the world seeking theological education. Pray for the Spirit’s ongoing call in their lives and for access to resources to continue their formation as spiritual leaders in The United Methodist Church.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of the “Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God’s Children” initiative.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

What is faith for? Does that seem like the wrong question? We spend a lot of time and energy asking what faith is, trying to understand, trying to examine and explain. As if when we got the definition right then everyone would get on board. Or we consider how we make sure we have it, and which faith is authentic. Certainly, orthodoxy matters. Certainly, right thinking, theological thinking matters, ideas matter. We are not intending to deny that. Let us study, let us think, let us analyze and parse and understand. But let us also live.

Faith is not meant to reside only in the head. It is a whole-body experience. We are called to live our faith. But, as we know, there is living and there is living. There is living as breathing, moving, putting one foot in front another, making sure you have a pulse. Let's be honest, there are days when that is the best we can do. Just putting one foot in front of another as we trudge through the burdens of the day, the wreckage of our society, the distress of the nations, whatever weight we may be carrying. There are times in our lives when asking for something more seems offensive. A shallow faith that must be "happy all the day" can't sustain us when the sky is falling. So, we cannot belittle the kind of living that looks more like surviving. Yet at the same time we can point to something more.

That something more is eternity, but an eternity that begins now, in this life. We cannot simply offer "pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die" and expect anyone to line up for that offer. Instead we embrace what Jesus describes when he says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (*John 10:10b NRSV*)

*Abundantly – **adverb**, 1. Very, 2. plentifully; in abundance, "Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012*

The bishops of the United Methodist Church are challenging us to live a life of abundance, a life of passion, of boldness and joy and courage. To live what we are calling an "*adverbial faith*." We know that we are called by Christ to love, but we are called to love boldly. We know that we as followers of Christ embrace serving, but we hear an invitation to serve joyfully. We know that kingdom, kin-dom living requires those who will lead, and empowered by the Spirit we hope to lead courageously.

Adverbial faith is a partnership. Psalm 16 could be understood to draw a picture of the growing partnership of empowered adverbial faith. "Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge." The cry of the psalmist begins with a call for protection, for a hiding place. But then then as the relationship grows, as the need progresses something new takes place. We see the value in the life described by the law of the people of God. The vision of who they are called to be leads to nobility and to delight. And then those lines, those boundaries are seen as pleasant and the author of the law is now a companion, a heart friend. There is where gladness and rejoicing is found. There is where security is found, in the definition of living as part of the community of faith, as a part of the noble ones. Until finally we find fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. From needing refuge to living a life of fullness, that is what the psalmist describes in those eleven short verses.

In the heart of this psalm is the invitation to stay close to God. "I bless the Lord who gives me counsel... (*Psalm 16:7 NRSV*) We know that it is the Holy Spirit that provides this counsel, it is one of the functions of the Spirit that Jesus outlines for us. To instruct us, to empower us to guide and direct us. The Spirit empowers us as disciples. Our task, says the psalmist, is to keep the Lord, the Spirit ever before us. (*Psalm 16:8 NRSV*) At our right hand to keep our feet on the path and our eyes on the prize of becoming the disciples that Christ calls us to be, that we are growing into. In communion with the Spirit, our hearts are glad, and our souls rejoice; and our bodies also rest securely. (*Psalm 16:9 NRSV*)

The life embraced is not just about safety, though that may be a starting point. It is now something better, something bigger. There is passion here, there is contentment, there is joy. This is the life that faith brings. Not in the absence of struggle or even suffering, but the fullness continues through the difficulties. "For you

do not give me up to Sheol” the psalmist writes. You do not abandon me on the brink; you accompany me and rescue me from this total destruction. And even there the path of life is revealed, is offered.

The letter to the Colossians describes a similar growth to fullness. The author, and we acknowledge some debate as to whether it was Paul or Timothy or some other writer, reminds the readers—like us—that faith is a process. It may begin with receiving Christ like a gift but then grows into a life lived in that relationship. What was given is now rooted or built up—like we couldn’t decide which metaphor to use here—grows or is constructed within us and radiates out from us. We are building or growing toward the fullness that was in Christ, reflecting that fullness in our own lives even as we follow.

Notice the warning. The invitation is to avoid emptiness. Whatever it is that might take the fullness away, to diminish it. Whatever it is that might tamp down the glow, arrest the growth, interfere with the construction—choose your own metaphor! We don’t have to name the philosophy or deceit that is described, we know it. We know what kills our joy. We know what drains our faith. We know what divides us and wounds us and tears down what we are seeking to build up. Sometimes it comes from within. Sometimes it comes at us like a heat seeking missile. Sometimes we are able to sidestep, other times we are taken captive. That is when we seek refuge once more. That is when we lean into the adverbial faith of the community that surrounds us and supports us. That’s when we are reminded that it isn’t our fullness but Christ’s fullness that dwells in us. It isn’t about our strengths or our weaknesses, our gifts or our lack, it is about him. The gifts and the strengths are by products of the relationship. They are what we build, what we grow in our relationship with Christ and the community.

We claim adverbial faith and live deeper, louder, wider. You choose the adverb. You choose it as individuals at times, and you choose it as a community. What is the adverb that we live together in this place, in your place? We can choose the adverbs that define us. The bishops give us some, not to limit us, but to inspire us. To challenge us. But when we choose, make sure one of them is “corporately”. We’re in this together. The yous in our Colossians text are plurals. All y’all’s. We are not called to make this journey, to live an adverbial faith alone. We are invited into the community of faith, the body of Christ. That is what faith is for, to lead us together to a life of abundance.

WEEK 2 | Disciples Empowered by the Holy Spirit

MUSIC RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

THEME: *Living a full, abundant, whole-bodied faith.*

Traditional Hymns (*United Methodist Hymnal*, UMH)

- Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (UMH 384)
- Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (UMH 400)
- Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee (UMH 89)

***The Faith We Sing* (TFWS) / *Worship and Song* (W&S)**

- Together We Serve (TFWS 2175)
- Come, Now Is the Time to Worship (W&S 3176)

African American / Gospel

- Every Time I Feel the Spirit (UMH 404)
- He's Got the Whole World in His Hands (SOZ 85)
- I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me (TFWS 2153)
- Lift Every Voice and Sing (UMH 519)

Global Songs

- Halle, Halle, Hallelujah (TFWS 2026) – Caribbean
- Cantemos al Señor (Let's Sing Unto the Lord) (UMH 149)
- Santo, Santo, Santo (TFWS 2007) – Argentinian traditional

Songs from *Songs of Zion* (SOZ)

- Come Out the Wilderness (SOZ 136)
- Plenty Good Room (SOZ 99)
- Oh, How I Love Jesus (SOZ 36)

Modern Worship (CCLI)

- Goodness of God – Bethel Music
- Yes I Will – Vertical Worship
- Build My Life – Pat Barrett

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of God, when we feel afraid and pressed in on every side...

The Spirit protects and advocates for us.

When the world's problems seem too big to solve, and we don't know how to do the next right thing...

The Spirit comforts and strengthens us.

When we need wisdom to know what is ours to do and the courage to act...

The Spirit counsels and empowers us.

Family of God, on this journey of faith, we are not alone—God is with us!

Today, we call once again on the Holy Spirit to empower us to live as disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God,
who is more than we can ever imagine,
give us a wider vision of the world;
give us a broader view of justice;
give us dreams of peace
that are not defined by boundaries of geography
or race or religion,
or by the limitations of worldly structures and
systems.

Open our hearts and our minds
that wherever we go,
we may know your voice calling us by name;
calling us to serve,
calling us to share,
calling us to praise,
so that we never give up on the promise of your
kingdom,
where the world is transformed,
and all can enjoy life in all its fullness.
Amen.

*Adapted from the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website,
<http://www.christianaid.org.uk>. Reposted on the re:Worship blog at
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/04/prayer-vision-of-abundant-life.html>.*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of gentle rains and warm sun, God who encourages growth,

we are creatures who sometimes grow quickly, and sometimes get stuck.

God of freedom, of liberation, of binding ropes being cut,

we are bound in ways we don't always understand or recognize.

God of exodus and exile and homecoming,

God who calls us to leave where we are and come home,

help us to have the courage to make the journey and to trust in the path.

God of health and healing,

God, who wants us to be made whole,

we come as people who are wounded in body and in spirit, people who seek healing.

God, who has laid out a way for us to live,

who has given us rules for living in community,

we come as people who sometimes go astray, people who stretch the rules.

God of Grace,

we come as people who live through that Grace.

And so, we praise you for the growth,

we rejoice in being set free,

we dance along the path that leads us home,

we give thanks for the healing we have received,

we relax in the knowledge that we are forgiven,

and we live as people of Grace. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Gord and posted on Worship Offerings,
<http://worshipofferings.blogspot.ca>. Reposted on the re:Worship blog at
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/07/a-summer-prayer-for-grace.html>.*

BENEDICTION

Go now in the blessing of the Holy Spirit who empowers and inspires you to cooperate with God's grace and join in the work of building God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

WEEK 2 | Disciples Empowered by the Holy Spirit

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

Abundant God, you call us beyond survival into life—abundant, rooted, and overflowing. You invite us to walk by faith, not as individuals alone, but as a community growing together in Christ's fullness. Receive now these gifts we offer, not out of scarcity or obligation, but in joyful response to your goodness. Use them—and use us—to build up the body, to bless the world, and to proclaim that, in you, there is always more: more joy, more hope, more life. We give, trusting that you are still planting, still building, still transforming us into bold and joyful disciples. In the name of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

WEEK 2 | Disciples Empowered by the Holy Spirit

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

Adverb: Faithfully

Props: A taped path or ribbon on the floor; a small sign that says “Jesus’ Way;” footprint cutouts

Message:

Good morning, friends! I brought something fun for us to look at again today. Do you see this path on the floor? Do you remember this from last week? Who thinks they can walk along it without stepping off? Let’s see who can do it! Let’s select some different people from last week.

(Use either a taped path or place the footprints in a straight line on the floor. Let two or three different children try walking the path slowly.)

Fantastic job! Now, I wonder... what helped you stay on the path? *(Pause for answers like “watching,” “balancing,” “going slow.”)* Yes! Those are all things that helped you stay on track.

You know, this path reminds me of something in the Bible. Psalm 16 says that God shows us the path of life. That means God wants to help us know the best way to live, just as this path helps us know where to step.

Jesus said in John 10:10, “I came so they may have life” — life full of joy! Isn’t that wonderful? Jesus wants us to have a full, happy, meaningful life. How does that make you feel? *(Let kids respond.)*

Colossians 2:6–7 says, “You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living your lives in him. Have your roots in him.” When I think about roots, I think about trees. Tall, strong trees have deep roots underground. Can everyone stand up and pretend to be a tree with roots? Wiggle your feet like roots growing deep into the ground.

(Children wiggle their feet, pretending to grow roots.)

Wow! You are amazing trees. Roots help a tree stay strong. Jesus helps us stay strong.

For the next few weeks, we’re going to learn a special kind of word each Sunday. These words are called adverbs. Can you say “adverb”? *(Let the children repeat the word.)*

Now, that’s a big word, so let’s make it easy.

A verb is an action — something you do.

Let’s think of some actions: can you *jump*? *Clap*? *Wave*?

(Let the children show actions.)

Great! “Jump,” “clap,” and “wave” are verbs; they are things we *do*.

Now, an **adverb** is a word that tells us **how, when, or where** we do something. It gives us a little more information.

So, if I *jump*, I can jump **quickly**.

If I *clap*, I can clap **loudly**.

If I *walk*, I can walk **slowly**.

Did you hear those words — *quickly, loudly, slowly*?

Those are **adverbs**. They help us understand *how* the action is done.

Now let’s think about *following* Jesus.

“Follow” is the action. That’s our verb.

Following Jesus is something we *do* every day.

So, what kind of word can tell us **how** we follow Jesus?

(Pause for children to think.)

We follow Jesus...**faithfully!**

Let's say it together: **Faithfully!**

That's right! We follow Jesus faithfully. Let's say it together again: Faithfully!

Living faithfully means:

- We try to follow Jesus every day.
- We listen for God.
- We try to choose kindness.
- We keep going, even when things get hard.
- When we make mistakes, God helps us get back on the path.

Now, let's do something fun. Let's all walk the path together slowly, pretending we are walking faithfully with Jesus beside us. *(If space allows, have the children walk the path. If there's not enough space, have them walk in place.)*

As we walk, lift our feet and put them back down, remember our Bible verse from Colossians that says we are to have roots in Jesus. Remember how we wiggled our feet to remind us of those roots? Wiggle your feet and imagine your roots getting stronger. As we walk, each step we take begins with pushing off from the ground with our feet. The faster we push off the ground, the faster we walk or run! We need strong feet to walk long distances. Remember, Jesus helps us stay strong, even as we walk faithfully with him.

Now, I have a question for you. When we walk faithfully with Jesus, how should we feel in our hearts? *(Pause for responses.)* Yes, we should feel safe, happy, and loved! That is what living faithfully feels like.

Let's say together one more time: "Jesus shows me the way I can live faithfully every day!"

Blessing/Prayer:

Open your hands like you're ready to receive a gift.

May the Holy Spirit guide you to love boldly.

May the example of Christ inspire you to serve joyfully.

May the strength of God's love empower you to lead courageously.

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Lead courageously.

Amen.

Between the Sundays: Family Conversation Starters and Activities

These questions and activities are designed to help families talk, play, and pray together during the week. They connect with the children's message shared on Sunday and help reinforce faith learning at home. Use them at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime — anytime your family is together.

They are simple, short, and open-ended, so children can respond in their own ways.

These conversations help grow faith in everyday moments and remind families that following Jesus happens all week long — not just on Sundays.

Theme: Jesus shows us the path.

Adverb: Faithfully

Conversation Starters:

- What was one way you tried to follow Jesus today?
- Where did you see kindness today? Where could you add kindness tomorrow?
- What helps you stay on the “path” that Jesus shows us?
- If following Jesus is like walking a path, what does your path look like today?

Family Activities:

1. Follow-the-Path Walk

Make a simple tape path on the floor at home or draw one with sidewalk chalk outside. Take turns following it slowly and talk about: “Jesus is with me every step. I can follow him faithfully.”

2. Tree-Growing Game

Stand like a tree and wiggle your “roots” (feet) into the ground.

Then stretch your branches high.

Ask: “What helps your ‘roots’ grow strong in Jesus?”

3. Faithfulness Jar

Place a jar on the table. Any time someone in the family follows Jesus in a small way — kindness, helping, sharing — drop in a pom-pom or coin. At the end of the week, celebrate all the ways your family lived faithfully!

Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, thank you for showing us the path of life. Help our family follow you faithfully every day. Amen.

WEEK 2 | Disciples Empowered by the Holy Spirit

YOUTH MESSAGE

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:42–47, Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

Note to the Teacher:

This lesson explores what it means to live faith as something we do rather than just believe, focusing on what bold, joyful, and courageous faith feels like in real life. The icebreaker invites students to notice how slight changes in tone and action shape shared experiences. Reading scripture about the early Christian community leads to a discussion about how faith takes shape in everyday practices and relationships. The activity helps students physically and collaboratively explore the “shape” of a community formed by the Holy Spirit, reflecting on how adverbial faith sounds, feels, and looks when lived together.

Icebreaker (10 min): “Say It Differently”

Have everyone stand in a circle. Choose a simple phrase such as, “We’re in this together.” Choose a student to begin. Moving around the circle, each person repeats the phrase while changing how they say it (for example, confidently, quietly, excitedly, calmly). There can be no duplicate versions, and each student will have five seconds to begin. If they take too long or repeat a previous version, they move to the center of the circle. Continue until there is one person left; then begin again with all the students.

Before moving on, talk about what changed about the meaning, even though the words stayed roughly the same.

Bible Reading (5 min): Acts 2:42–47

Discussion Questions (10 min):

- What actions or practices do you remember from this description of the early community?
- How would you describe the atmosphere of this group of people?
- What seems to matter most to this community, based on what they do together?
- What do you notice about how faith is lived out publicly versus privately in this passage?
- How long do you think it takes to form a habit as a person? As a community? When does something we do together become a tradition?
- What kinds of habits or rhythms shape the communities you are part of today?
- What types of practices or habits might your group add or change to reflect who you are becoming together?

Active Learning Activity (20 min): “Building the Shape of Community”

Divide students into small groups of two or three and explain that they will pose to depict each of the following prompts. They will have two minutes to come up with a group pose for each one. Be sure to have a camera ready, as these can make great online posts as long as you have their parents’ or guardians’ permission.

There is no right answer, of course, and it is not a contest. This is a time to be creative, embody ideas, and process them in a new way.

Examples of prompts:

- Boldly showing up for one another
- Joyfully sharing time or resources
- Courageously welcoming someone new
- Practicing faith together during the week
- Supporting one another through change

After several rounds, bring everyone back together and reflect on what they noticed:

- What did you notice about how your group worked together to form each shape?
- Which prompt felt easiest or hardest to embody, and why do you think that was?
- How did using your body change the way you thought about faith and community?

Prayer (5 min): Close the session in a manner traditional to or appropriate for your group.

WEEK 2 | Disciples Empowered by the Holy Spirit

SMALL GROUPS

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 16, John 10:10, Colossians 2:6–10

Fellowship (10+ min): Snacks or a Meal

Gathering Time (5–10 min):

Ask participants, “Do you remember what role an adverb plays in grammar? Here’s a reminder:

An *adverb* is a word such as “slowly,” “now,” “very,” “politically,” or “fortunately,” which *adds information about the action, event, or situation* mentioned in a clause (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/adverb>).

In other words, an adverb tells us *the way we do something*. In groups of two or three, choose an adverb that describes *how* you came to the small group today: quietly, happily, dutifully, cautiously, willingly, quickly, or... fill in the blank!”

Group Dialogue (30 min):

Read the texts before responding to the questions below.

Read Psalm 16.

- Describe the progression of the psalmist’s proclamations.
- How do you think the psalmist feels at the beginning of the psalm? What about at the end?
- Can you choose a verse or phrase from Psalm 16 that speaks to you?

Read John 10:10.

- Jesus contrasts the life he gives with other ways of living. Based on this passage and Jesus’ other teachings, what kind of life is he describing?
- If abundant life is less about what we possess and more about how we live, what adverbs best capture its character?
- Consider a time you sensed abundance by this definition. What contributed to that experience of abundance?

Read Colossians 2:6–10.

- This passage contrasts life in Christ and living in the spiritual forces of the world. What are the attributes of those two ways of living?
- Describe what it looks like to live a life rooted in Christ in your community, church, workplace, or family.
- What does a person who wants to live “in Christ” do, say, believe, or think?
- What are the challenges to this way of living?

The Preaching Note for this week says,

We claim adverbial faith and live deeper, louder, wider. You choose the adverb. You choose it as individuals at times, and you choose it as a community.

- What adverb do you want to choose for your faith life for the week ahead?
- What adverbs would you suggest our community live out in our faith life?

Just One Thing:

What is one thing you could do in the week ahead to embody the adverb that you want to claim?

Going Deeper on Your Own:

This week, consider studying one of the selected texts in the following pattern:

- Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to the scripture (Psalm 119:18).
- Read the text (Psalm 16, John 10:10, or Colossians 2:6–10) out loud.
- What do you notice about the text?
- What questions arise?
- What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?

Prayer (10 min):

Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 min):

End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God of abundance, we confess that our hearts and minds can sometimes experience distance from you. We echo the words of the psalmist when we say, "You make known to (us) the path of life; you will fill (us) with joy in your presence." Open our hearts and minds and shape our wills to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as we learn to walk more faithfully in your presence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Lev. 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

How do we love boldly? Our scriptures describe what this love requires of us. John's gospel reminds us that we are defined by Jesus' command to love. Yet, for many of us, the question of *how* to love boldly remains. For some, it may feel daunting. Where do I start? Won't I burn out? Just how bold is "boldly" anyway? For others, it may feel scary. What will happen if others don't like it when I love boldly? What if loving boldly leaves me out on a limb all by myself? What if I'm not ready to take the risk? These questions are significant, and they can stop us in our tracks, freezing us in place until we're unwilling or unable to move forward at all.

As big and scary as these questions can feel, it is precisely at the meeting point of love and fear, risk and worry, that worship is exactly where we need to be. Because, in worship, we actively remind one another that we are not alone. God calls us to risk loving boldly *together*. We respond to God *together*. We love with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths *together*. So, as you plan worship this week, find ways to emphasize togetherness. Help your congregation listen to one another as you sing and pray together. Remind them that we are partners in this "love like Jesus" thing. Pray for one another as family bound together by God's bold love. Call one another to love boldly as siblings in Christ. Remember together that the call to love boldly is a call to build community modeled after Christ.

Worship allows us to practice loving boldly. Tell stories of small acts of bold love in worship. Honestly name the hurts and hardships of your community in the prayers of the people. Ask God to show you how to respond to those hurts and hardships with God's bold and unfailing love. Talk about how theological education equips clergy and lay leaders with perspectives and tools that can guide a congregation in addressing the difficulties faced by their community. A few weeks in advance, ask the kids in your church to draw pictures of what they think loving boldly looks like. Set up those pictures as prayer stations around the worship space or display them on the screens during a time of quiet prayer and reflection. Throughout this service, identify moments to emphasize that God calls us to love boldly because God boldly loves us. We give what we have received, and what we have received is more than enough.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Take twenty minutes this week to walk or drive around your neighborhood. Before you go, pray for God to help you notice how your neighborhood needs you to love boldly. Commit to one small act of resisting injustice and loving boldly in the week to come.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Lev. 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

What is the greatest commandment? Finally, an easy one. We've learned this by heart. No, that's not quite true. We've learned it by rote. We know the words; we can quote the scripture. But have we learned it by heart? Have we taken it in and wrestled with the implications? Do we understand the risks involved in loving? That is what is behind the bishops' vision statement, or so it seems. It is a call to risk loving. It is a call to understand the boldness of this way of being. Because that what this call is, this commandment. It is not an action, per se. It is a way of being.

But let's back up for a moment and examine the commandment. First of all, understanding love as something that can be commanded is something that swims against the tide of common understanding. Love, in popular culture, is a response or even a reaction to circumstance or an individual. Love just happens to us. We fall in love, we say, love at first sight is a cliché. It just happens. Yet here is Jesus—following a long-standing Hebrew tradition—saying that love is a commandment. Three of the four Gospels present this commandment as a response to a specific question: what is the greatest commandment. In Matthew and in Luke it comes across as a test, as a way of catching him out as an inadequate teacher. But Mark's story is a little bit different. Here the question seems more sincere. Yes, that is an interpretative statement, so look for yourself as you prepare to preach. What do you think is in the mind and heart of the scribe who asks Jesus this question in our text?

Mark writes that the scribe "seeing that he answered them well, asked him..." (*Mark 12:28 NRSV*). There was something in the prior debate that struck this scribe as powerful. I've speculated that what he actually thought was "here is a man who argues like a scribe!" For him that was a great compliment. It was a resonance, he's like me. So, it was out of the revelation that the scribe decides to interrupt the "get Jesus" session with an honest question. And Jesus response with that same honesty. The exchange between the two is amazing to consider. The scribe is pleased with Jesus and Jesus is pleased with the scribe. It goes back and forth and culminates with the incredible statement from Jesus "you are not far from the kingdom." (*Mark 12:34 NRSV*) Wow, what would we give to hear Jesus say that to us?

What made Jesus respond this way to the inquisitive scribe? Was it his enthusiasm about a commandment to love? By leaning into Jesus's quoting of the law with a passion that embraced the possibilities, the scribe was expressing the boldness of such a command, the boldness of loving. Notice how the scribe reemphasizes the "all" words in the command. You can almost hear that emphasis is the recitation—"with ALL the heart, with ALL the understanding, and with ALL the strength." ALL, ALL, ALL. Let the words rest on the ears of the hearers as you preach. ALL, ALL, ALL. That is where the boldness begins. That is where the closeness to the kingdom comes from, that desire to give all. It is an invitation to live full out. To not hold back, to not keep a little in reserve. With all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. That's the only thing Jesus wants from us—everything.

Jesus also goes above and beyond with the answer. He is asked for one commandment, and instead he gives two. Twice as much as requested. Or is it? Is a part of what Jesus is really saying that there is only one commandment. Granted in Mark's gospel Jesus is recorded as saying "the second" from which we hear that there are two greatest commandments. But we can't help but wonder if what he wanted us to hear is that this is an undivided pair. These are two sides of the same coin.

Jesus turns to Leviticus for his answer. Both commandments he quotes come from Torah, but they aren't side by side. He most likely was not the first to put these two together, the scribe's response does not include surprise or wonder at the pairing. But it does present an emphasis for us to contemplate. Read the Hebrew scripture chosen for this series. This is not a one off, but a carefully constructed ethos for the people of God. It is a reminder that hospitality is at the core of their (and our) theological identity. There is in this a concern for the local poor and for the immigrant or alien as named in the text. How could this kind of love be bolder in our current social and political reality?

“In a time of hate / Love is an act of resistance” is the opening line from a poem by Loryn Brantz.

<https://mapawoods.com/2025/02/16/act-of-resistance>. It is a reminder of the risk we take when we decide to love like Jesus in our world today. Which has to bring us back to the question we posed at the beginning of these notes: can such a love be commanded?

John’s gospel doesn’t have a conversation on the greatest commandment like the others do. Instead, we have something a little different. During what we’ve come to call the Farewell Discourse just present the commandment as something new. “I give you a new commandment,” he says in our third text. (*John 13:34 NRSV*) It is presented not simply as a commandment, but as an identifier. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, this love thing. This commanded love thing. It will make us stand out. Make us different from a world that has self-interest at its heart. Put us at risk.

That is the hard truth of this part of the bishops’ vision, there is risk here. We are called to love in a culture driven by fear. We are called to welcome in a moment of anxiety over difference. We are to embrace a multicultural representation of the kin-dom of God that comes from every nation and containing every tribe and people, in a time of supremacy and domination. What adverb would you use other than boldly? This commanded love is not a reaction to situations or individuals. Instead, it is an act of will, a choice that we make about who we are and how we will live in our world day by day. We take our lead not from a culture or fear and suspicion, but from the Lord who commands us to love. We love because we choose to love. We love because we are empowered by the Spirit to Love, commanded by the Christ to love, created by God to love. We will love boldly.

WEEK 3 | Love Boldly

MUSIC RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Lev. 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

THEME: *Risking love in a fearful world; choosing love as an act of courage.*

Traditional Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal, UMH)

- Lord, I Want to Be a Christian (UMH 402)
- Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (UMH 432)
- Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (UMH 384)
- Help Us Accept Each Other (UMH 560)

The Faith We Sing (TFWS) / Worship and Song (W&S)

- The Summons (TFWS 2130)
- Love the Lord (W&S 3116)
- We Are the Body of Christ (TFWS 2227)

African American / Gospel

- There Is a Balm in Gilead (UMH 375)
- Give Me a Clean Heart (TFWS 2133)
- I Need You to Survive – Hezekiah Walker
- The Jesus in Me Loves the Jesus in You (W&S 3151; *Zion Still Sings* 132)

Global Songs

- Ubi Caritas et Amor (TFWS 2179) – Taizé community (France)
- Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo / We Are the Body of Christ (TFWS 2273) – Mexico/U.S.
- Jesu Tawa Pano (Jesus, We Are Here) (TFWS 2279) – Zimbabwe

Songs from Songs of Zion (SOZ)

- I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (SOZ 95)
- Fix Me, Jesus (SOZ 122)
- Give Me a Clean Heart” (SOZ 182) – (Margaret Douroux)

Modern Worship (CCLI)

- Reckless Love – Cory Asbury
- Who You Say I Am – Hillsong Worship

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Lev. 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of God, who are you?

We are disciples formed in the image of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Family of God, how does Jesus form you?

By loving us and showing us how to love.

Family of God, how does the Holy Spirit empower you?

By loving us and inspiring us to love others as Christ loves us.

Family of God, on this journey of faith, we are not alone—God is with us!

We come to worship God, who shows us how to love and calls us to boldly love God and neighbor, that we may be disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty, all-merciful God,
through Christ Jesus, you have taught us to love one another,
to love our neighbors as ourselves,
and even to love our enemies.
As we gather for worship and as we are sent from this place,
let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.
Help us to encounter each person in light of the love and grace
you have shown us in Christ.
Establish among us a future where peace reigns,
justice is done with mercy, and all are reconciled.
We ask these things in the name
and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Adapted from a collection of Prayers for Times of National and International Crisis and Tragedy, posted on the PCUSA website, <http://www.pcusa.org>. Reposted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/07/prayer-in-times-of-violence-and-fear.html>.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

With hope for God's mercy and trust in God's love, let us admit the truth of our lives, first in silent prayer.

Silent prayer

There are times, O God, when our greatest sin is not what we do but what we fail to do. For those times when we have not spoken up; for those times when we have not acted; for those times when we have not responded: forgive us. Give us courage to name what is wrong when we see it. Give us confidence to do what is hard. Give us grace to reach out when that is frightening or uncomfortable. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

New every morning is God's love for us, and so we are bold to proclaim the Good News:

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good." Used with permission. <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession>.

BENEDICTION

When love reigns, the world will change.
Be the love that the world needs
For the kin-dom to become our beloved realm.
Go, in the assurance that the God of Love,
Who is Love, is with you.

Written by Dr. Cheryl Lindsay on the Worship Ways website at <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/after-pentecost-24b-november-3>.

WEEK 3 | Love Boldly

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28-34, Lev. 19:9-18, John 13:34-35

Gracious Commander of Love, you have taught us what love looks like, and you have commanded us to live it. In a world that rewards fear and self-interest, you call us to give boldly, to serve generously, and to risk loving with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Receive these offerings as signs of our obedience and as seeds of a kingdom where welcome is wide, grace is abundant, and love never holds back. We give, not from obligation, but from the joy of being shaped by your love. In Christ's name, Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Leviticus 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

Adverb: *Boldly*

Props: Heart stickers; posterboard that says, “Bold Love Starts Here.”

Message:

Good morning, friends! Today, we’re going to talk about something incredibly special: **love**. Can anyone tell me what love means? *(Let the children answer.)* That’s right; love is caring for God and other people.

A long time ago, a man asked Jesus a very important question: “Jesus, what is the MOST important commandment?” A commandment is a law or rule that God gives. So, in other words, Jesus’ question was, “What is the MOST important rule?” What do you think Jesus said? *(Pause for guesses.)*

Jesus said, “**Love God with your whole heart.**” He also said, “**Love your neighbor as you love yourself.**” Wow! That’s a big job, isn’t it? And in John 13, Jesus said, “**Love one another, just as I have loved you.**” That’s love that is huge, strong, and brave.

We call that kind of love **bold love**. *Bold* means big, brave, and courageous. So, our adverb for this week is **boldly**. Can you say “boldly”? *(The children repeat the word.)*

An adverb tells us **how** we do something. Today, it tells us **how we love**. So, when we love *boldly*, we:

- Love first, even if no one else does.
- Love big, not small, or halfway.
- Love, even when it’s hard.
- Look for people who feel sad or alone.

Now, let’s imagine some ways we can love boldly.

If you see someone sitting alone at lunch, how could you love boldly? *(Let the children answer.)* Yes! That is loving boldly.

If someone drops their books, what could you do? *(Let the children answer.)* Wonderful! That is loving boldly.

Here’s something fun: I have heart stickers. When you take a sticker, place it on our poster that says, “Bold Love Starts Here.” Before you place your sticker, think of one way to love someone boldly this week.

(Children place their stickers.) Look at how beautiful bold love looks when we all share it!

Let’s practice a motion for bold love. Stretch your arms wide like you’re giving a giant hug. That’s how big loving boldly can be!

Let’s say together one more time: “**I can love boldly because Jesus loves me first!**”

Blessing/Prayer:

Now let’s close with our blessing. Open your hands like you’re ready to receive a gift:

May the Holy Spirit guide you to love boldly.

May the example of Christ inspire you to serve joyfully.

May the strength of God’s love empower you to lead courageously.

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Lead courageously.

Amen.

Between the Sundays: Family Conversation Starters and Activities

These questions and activities are designed to help families talk, play, and pray together during the week. They connect with the children's message shared on Sunday and help reinforce faith learning at home. Use them at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime — anytime your family is together.

They are simple, short, and open-ended, so children can respond in their own ways.

These conversations help grow faith in everyday moments and remind families that following Jesus happens all week long — not just on Sundays.

Theme: We love others the way Jesus loves us.

Adverb: *Boldly*

Conversation Starters:

- Whom did you love boldly today?
- What would Jesus do if he saw someone feeling sad or alone?
- When is it hard for you to love boldly?
- How do you feel when someone loves you in a big, brave way?

Family Activities:

1. Bold Love Scavenger Hunt

Look around your house or neighborhood for places your family can show love:

- Someone who needs help.
- A place to clean together.
- A friend or neighbor to encourage.

Talk about each one as a “Bold Love Mission.”

2. Love Big Art Moment

Give your children heart stickers or crayons and a big piece of paper. Invite them to draw or decorate a picture of someone they want to love boldly.

Ask: “Why did you choose that person?”

3. Family Bold Love Challenge

Choose *one* way your family will love boldly this week:

- Make a card for someone.
- Donate food.
- Share toys with a friend.
- Invite someone to play.

Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, thank you for loving us first. Help our family love others boldly just as you do. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Lev. 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

Note to the Teacher:

This lesson explores what it means to love boldly when fear and risk are real. The icebreaker prompts students to discuss everyday situations in which love can feel easy or uncomfortable. After reading Jesus' command to love, students discuss how fear can stop us and how community makes bold love possible. In the activity, students use art and layering to explore how fear and support exist together, discovering that loving boldly does not mean ignoring fear but practicing love alongside others who help carry it.

Supplies Needed:

- Plain white paper (one sheet per student)
- Markers or colored pencils
- Pens or pencils
- Optional: tracing paper or vellum (one sheet per student, for the layering variation)

Icebreaker (10 min): “Easy or Risky?”

Arrange students in pairs. Try to create pairs of students who can talk to each other and learn something new about each other. Read a series of simple, everyday situations one at a time (examples below). After each one, students briefly turn to one or two people near them and answer the question. Ask the groups, “Would this feel easy or risky for you?” Ask them to raise their hands to signify which one.

Then have students turn to their partners and explain why they chose the response they did. If students are willing to share, have one or two give their explanations before moving to the next situation.

Example situations to read aloud:

- Standing up for a friend who is being teased.
- Inviting someone new to sit with you.
- Saying you are sorry when you messed up.
- Including someone others usually ignore.
- Checking in on someone who seems upset.

After several rounds, ask the group what they noticed about people experiencing the same situation differently.

Bible Reading (5 min): John 13:34–35**Discussion Questions (10 min):**

- How does Jesus describe the kind of love his followers are known for?
- What feels difficult, risky, or uncomfortable about loving this way?
- Where have you seen bold love practiced in small or ordinary ways?
- How does community help people keep going when love feels risky?
- What kinds of fears can stop people from loving boldly?
- What might “loving boldly” look like for a group of people rather than just one person?

Active Learning Activity (20 min): “Bold Love Layers”

Give each student a sheet of paper and markers. Invite students to write or draw words, symbols, colors, or shapes that represent fears, risks, or worries that make loving boldly hard. Tell them the words or symbols should be spaced out, leaving plenty of white space around them. Emphasize that this exercise can be abstract or symbolic. They will not have to explain or justify what they choose.

After a few minutes, ask them to add words, symbols, or colors that represent support, community, and togetherness around or connected to what they already created. Tell them not to overwrite or erase their earlier work.

After the students finish, invite volunteers to share what they noticed about how the layers interacted. Explain that bold love does not remove fear, but allows love to grow, as it is supported by others.

Optional Variation *(if supplies are available)*

In addition to the original sheet of paper, give each student a second sheet of translucent paper (like tracing paper).

Students first create their drawings about fear or risk on the solid paper. Then they place the translucent sheet on top and add symbols, words, or colors that represent support, community, and shared love.

The original layer remains visible underneath. This option visually reinforces the idea that community does not replace fear but allows love to be practiced through community.

Reflection Questions:

- What did you notice about how the support layer interacted with what was underneath?
- How did it feel to let both fear and support exist at the same time?
- What does this help you understand about loving boldly with others instead of alone?

Prayer (5 min): Close the session in a manner traditional to or appropriate for your group.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28–34, Lev. 19:9–18, John 13:34–35

Fellowship (10+ min): Snacks or a Meal

Gathering Time (5–10 min):

In groups of two or three, answer this question: “We are connecting love with boldness in our lesson for today. Love is at the heart of God’s character, and *boldly* is the adverb that we are seeking to embody for love. When have you witnessed someone loving boldly?”

Group Dialogue (30 min):

Read the texts before responding to the questions below.

Read Mark 12:28–34.

- What do you notice about the teacher of the law who asked Jesus about the most important commandment? What are some reasons the teacher could have asked Jesus the question?
- What do you notice about Jesus’ response to his question?
- What do you think it would have been like to hear Jesus say, “You are not far from the kingdom of God”?

Read Leviticus 19:9–18.

The newly forming community is instructed to honor God and one another.

- Where do you see bold and/or loving acts described in this text?
- Based on this brief passage, how would you define what it means to “love boldly”?

Read John 13:34–35.

Jesus says it’s a “new” commandment to love one another.

- Why do you think Jesus called it “new”? [Sometimes we use the word “new” when something is “new to us” without being “brand new.”]
 - » You may want to read or reference the context (before and after) of these verses: John 13:1–17, John 13:36–38, John 13:18–30, and John 13:36–38. John 13:1–17 reveals a humble, servant-hearted Jesus washing the disciples’ feet; John 13:18–30 shows Jesus naming his betrayer, and John 13:36–38 identifies that Peter, “the Rock,” will deny him.

The Preaching Note for this week references the opening lines of a poem¹ by Loryn Brantz that says, “*In a time of hate / Love is an act of resistance.*” The Preaching Note explains, “It is a reminder of the risk we take when we decide to love like Jesus in our world today.”

- How do you see loving as Jesus did being risky?

After considering all these scriptures, how do you connect love with boldness?

- What is the origin of loving boldly?

Just One Thing:

What is one thing you could do in the week ahead to embody what it means to love boldly?

¹ Loryn Brant, “Act of Resistance,” <https://mapawoods.com/2025/02/16/act-of-resistance/>.

Going Deeper on Your Own:

This week, consider studying one of the selected texts in the following pattern:

- Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to the scripture (Psalm 119:18).
- Read the text (Mark 12:28–24; Leviticus 19:9–18; John 13:34–35) out loud.
- What do you notice about the text?
- What questions arise?
- What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?

Prayer (10 min):

Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 min):

End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God of boldness, we confess that it feels risky to show the vulnerability that is part of love. Yet, we know that you have called us to the new commandment to love you with everything and love others the same way. Open our hearts and minds and shape our wills to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as we learn to walk more faithfully in your presence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

If we made a Venn diagram of examples of loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously, there's a good chance that we would find a lot of examples in the middle where each circle intersects with the others. For instance, a story you told last week in church about loving boldly might also work perfectly for this week's service, which is centered on serving joyfully. Don't resist that repetition! In education circles, this would be an example of spiral learning—coming back to a story or idea again and again, adding new learnings or perspectives each time. For instance, as we focus on theological education throughout this series, you might also take this opportunity to teach your congregation about John Wesley's views on education ([here is a great introduction on the subject](#)) as one of the ways the Holy Spirit forms us in personal and social holiness.

In addition, as you plan, consider how loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously can work together as a spiral that draws us deeper into love of God and neighbor. If you sing the same hymn throughout this series, one way to emphasize joy is to take a moment to highlight a new idea in a verse or the history of the hymn. You might even plan to sing the same text to different tunes and invite your congregation to notice how their experience of the hymn's message changes with each tune. For this particular week, choose a tune or a piece of the text that emphasizes joy—that deep and abiding sense of delight in cooperating with God's grace at work all around us. You might even have the children in your congregation lead in singing a song of joy or ask them to talk about what joy and service mean to them during the children's message. (Yes, the children's sermon is proclamation, too!)

At the same time, remember that it is not your job to manufacture joy. We do not have to feel joyous before we serve. Instead, we *choose* to serve joyfully in response to God's love and grace at work in our lives. So, build in moments of gratitude and witnessing to God's goodness in the life of your congregation. Give space for lament and grief if that's where your congregation is in this season. Serving joyfully and grieving graciously are not mutually exclusive. Rather, our joyful service is a communal expression of our trust in God's goodness and provision, a sharing of God's abundant life with our neighbors. Don't be afraid to experience a range of emotions in this worship service. If your community needs to cry, create space for tears. If your community needs to laugh, make space for laughter. If your community needs to be honest about frustrations and fears, offer moments when the community can tend to one another's frustrations and fears. In all these emotions, God's grace never fails. It is out of God's gracious gifts that God empowers us to joyfully serve a world in need of the good news.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Find moments during the week ahead to pray this breath prayer: (*inhale*) God, fill me with your joy, (*exhale*) so I can serve you with joy. Notice how God is at work, inspiring joy and empowering us to serve throughout the week.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of the "Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God's Children" initiative.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

Preaching joy is an easy task. Who doesn't want that uplift? Who doesn't want some celebration when we gather for worship? There is an expectation that joy, that deep-seated confidence of the grace of God at work in us and around us, will show up when we worship together. A quick look at Psalm 100 gives us a sense of this joy at work. There is an exuberance here that is catching. When we read it, or better yet, when we sing it, we can't help but feel this sense of joy surrounding us.

And yes, we do sing it. Hymn number 75 in our United Methodist Hymnal, "All People that on Earth Do Dwell." That's what we call it, but it is Psalm 100. Even the tune is called *Old 100th*. "Make a joyful noise, all the earth" (Psalm 100:1 NRSV) becomes "All people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice." Maybe you should sing it this week. Let it be a reminder of the call to be people of joy.

Perhaps the best part, however, is the next phrase in the first verse of the hymn. "Him serve with mirth." Let that one sink in for a moment. "With mirth." When was the last time you allowed a little mirth in worship? And not mirth as a distraction or an interruption, but as an intentional moment, and invitation into deeper worship. "Him serve with mirth." Serve.

We're not talking about joy for the sake of joy this week. Joy is the adverb, the definer. The verb, the action, the intent of this week's worship is service. Serve joyfully. Suddenly it doesn't seem so simple. When you pair joy with service something happens. It feels daunting, for some reason. It feels like commitment. Like effort, struggle, or burden. Besides, we might think, Psalm 100 is about worship and not about service. So, let's just talk about the worshipping joyfully. That seems easier somehow.

Except as the late Frederick Buechner wrote, the distinction might be misunderstood:

Phrases like Worship Service and Service of Worship are tautologies. To worship God means to serve God. Basically there are two ways to do it. One way is to do things for God that God needs to have done—run errands for God, carry messages for God, fight on God's side, feed God's lambs, and so on. The other way is to do things for God that you need to do—sing songs for God, create beautiful things for God, give things up for God, tell God what's on your mind and in your heart, in general rejoice in God and make a fool of yourself for God the way lovers have always made fools of themselves for the one they love.

A Quaker meeting, a pontifical High Mass, the family service at Zion Episcopal, a Holy Roller happening—unless there is an element of joy and foolishness in the proceedings, the time would be better spent doing something useful.

—Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, Harper & Row, 1973, 97–98

"Doing something useful" might be a great catchphrase for service in the name of the Lord. Especially when you add in Buechner's admonition that joy must be a part of it. We can't help but hear echoes of 1 Peter here. "Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received, writes the apostle (or someone using his name). (1 Peter 4:10 NRSV) A reminder, it seems of the corporate nature of spiritual gifts, on the one hand. The gift you've received is not for you, not for your benefit, but for the good of the community as a whole. Serve one another, he writes. That is the purpose of the manifold grace of God, for service. For building up. For creating community.

On the other hand, surely there is something about the spirit in which this service happens. We serve, or we are called to serve, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of giftedness. Out of an awareness of the presence of Christ in our service. In our words God speaks, says Peter, in our service God's strength is revealed. That is the source of the joy with which we serve. Not in our own words, not in our own strength, but in the very presence of Christ in our serving. In our doing something useful God is glorified. We serve out of love, we welcome without complaint, we steward the many gifts of God in order to bring God glory. Or rather, God

is glorified in our serving one another. God's glory is revealed in the useful things we do for and with one another. Peter is all about attitude in this text, the attitude with which we serve, with which we worship. And there is no other way, infused with the grace of Christ for us to serve than joyfully. *Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell; come ye before Him and rejoice*, we sing. With joy that bubbles throughout all that we do we serve to God's glory.

WEEK 4 | Serve Joyfully

MUSIC RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

THEME: *Serving others with gladness; worship as joyful service.*

Traditional Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal, UMH)

- All People That on Earth Do Dwell (UMH 75 – “Old 100th”)
- Here I Am, Lord (UMH 593)
- Rejoice, the Lord Is King (UMH 715)

The Faith We Sing (TFWS) / Worship and Song (W&S)

- Sent Out in Jesus’ Name (TFWS 2184)
- God Is So Good (TFWS 2056)
- Rule of Life (W&S 3117)

African American / Gospel

- I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me (TFWS 2153)
- I Will Trust in the Lord (UMH 464)
- My Tribute (To God Be the Glory) (UMH 99)
- Bless the Lord (Take 6/Gospel rendition)

Global Songs

- Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (UMH 432) – Ghanaian folk tune
- Many and Great, O God, Are Thy Works (UMH 148) – Dakota hymn
- Saranam, Saranam (UMH 523) – Pakistani/Punjabi hymn
- We Are Marching (Siyahamba) (TFWS 2235–b) – South Africa

Songs from Songs of Zion (SOZ)

- We’ll Understand It Better By and By (SOZ 55)
- This Little Light of Mine (SOZ 132)
- I’m Gonna Sing (SOZ 81)
- Lord, I Want to Be a Christian (SOZ 76)

Modern Worship (CCLI)

- House of the Lord – Phil Wickham
- Graves Into Gardens – Elevation Worship
- Joy of the Lord – Rend Collective

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of God, we gather to join our voices with all creation:

Make a joyful noise, all the earth! Serve God with gladness!

God is our Creator who loves us and cares for us.

Make a joyful noise, all the earth! Serve God with gladness!

God is our Savior who redeems us and teaches us to boldly love one another as God loves us.

Make a joyful noise, all the earth! Serve God with gladness!

God is our Advocate who sustains us and empowers us to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Make a joyful noise, all the earth! Serve God with gladness!

Family of God, on this journey of faith, we are not alone—God is with us!

We come to worship God by boldly loving and joyfully serving, that we may be disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

We worship you, O God, with joyful noise—with words of praise and adoration spoken and sung in the name of Jesus who brought your love song to us in person. You put new words in our mouths and new intentions in our hearts, especially a new understanding of power. Power shaped by love and righteousness, justice and mercy. We now know that power is not to be used to exploit or dominate, but to serve others as willingly as Jesus did. His life and death demonstrated how the love of power could be transformed by the power of love. We gather here today to celebrate your rule of love in our hearts as we experience it in Jesus and through the enabling gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Adapted from Moira Laidlaw, posted on her Liturgies Online website. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/11/call-to-worship-prayer-proper-29a.html>.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, too often,
we overlook the needs of people around us
while we proclaim our devotion to you.
We could do so much more to feed the hungry,
clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger, and heal
the sick.

We fail to recognize how our prison system
diminishes the humanity of all of us,
how our medical system denies healing to the poor,
how poverty leaves children without coats,
how legal obstacles keep the strangers at a distance.
Open our hearts to recognize your presence in every
person,
and to respond to their needs so that we may be
rightly called by your name. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Though we wander, God searches us out.
God reaches out to us, longing to bring us ever
closer.

Receive this good news:
God pardons our sin and frees us to boldly love
And joyfully serve God and neighbor.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
Glory to God! Amen.**

Adapted from Rev. Ruth Garwood on the Worship Ways website at <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/reign-of-christ-year-a-november-22-united-church-of-christ>.

BENEDICTION

May the joy of God surround you and sustain you,
flowing through you into joyful service as you boldly
share the love of God with all creation. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

WEEK 4 | Serve Joyfully

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

Joyful Giver of Every Good Gift, you call us to serve with glad hearts, to offer what we have with joy, and to love one another deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Receive these gifts as acts of praise. Use them to build up the body, to speak your truth with grace, and to serve others with strength not our own. Let us give not out of duty but as joyful stewards of your manifold grace, that in all things, through Christ, you may be glorified. In the name of the one who serves with us, Amen.

WEEK 4 | Serve Joyfully

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

Adverb: *Joyfully*

Props: Tray of “service items” (sponge, spoon, Band-Aid,® glove), smiley-face stickers.

Message:

Good morning, friends! Today, we are going to learn about serving. Serving means we are helping others. I want to read from two different parts of the Bible. One reading is from the Old Testament, and the other is from the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, Psalm 100 tells us: “Worship the Lord with gladness.” That means God loves it when we worship (and help) with happy hearts, not grumpy faces!

The reading from the New Testament, 1 Peter 4:10, tells us: “God’s gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully.” God gave each of us *special gifts*. When we use those gifts, we can help make the world better.

Our adverb for today is **joyfully**. Can you say “joyfully”? (*Children repeat the word.*) An adverb tells us how we do something, and today’s adverb, **joyfully**, tells us how we should serve. So, when we serve **joyfully**, we help others with smiles, glad hearts, and happiness.

I have a tray of items here — a sponge, a spoon, a Band-Aid, ® and a glove. Let’s look at how these items can help us serve:

- (*Show the children the sponge.*) A sponge can help clean up.
- (*Show the children the spoon.*) A spoon can help feed someone.
- (*Show the children the Band-Aid. ®*) A Band-Aid® can help someone feel better.
- (*Show the children a glove.*) A glove can help protect our hands while we are helping.

Now let’s practice! I’m going to give you a situation, and you can act it out.

- Your friend is sad. Show me how you could help them—with your hands, a hug, or a smile. (*Children act.*)
- Your family is cleaning up toys. Let’s all pretend to pick up toys with happy, big motions. (*Children act.*)
- Someone at school needs help zipping their coat. Show me how you could help. (*Children act.*)

You all did such an excellent job! Serving joyfully can be done with small actions, but God sees every act of love and happiness in your heart.

Now, I’m giving each of you a smiley-face sticker. When you wear it, remember: “Through my actions, I can serve joyfully for God!”

Let’s say together: “I can serve joyfully because God helps me!”

Blessing/Prayer:

May the Holy Spirit guide you to love boldly.

May the example of Christ inspire you to serve joyfully.

May the strength of God’s love empower you to lead courageously.

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Lead courageously.

Amen.

Between the Sundays: Family Conversation Starters and Activities

These questions and activities are designed to help families talk, play, and pray together during the week. They connect with the children's message shared on Sunday and help reinforce faith learning at home. Use them at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime — anytime your family is together.

They are simple, short, and open-ended, so children can respond in their own ways.

These conversations help grow faith in everyday moments and remind families that following Jesus happens all week long — not just on Sundays.

Theme: We help others with glad and happy hearts.

Adverb: *Joyfully*

Conversation Starters:

- What is one way you served someone today?
- What makes serving others a joyful activity?
- How has someone served you joyfully today?
- What special gifts has God given you to serve others? What special gifts do you see in another person in your family?

Family Activities:

1. Joyful Service Surprise
Choose a family member (or neighbor) and secretly plan a joyful act of service — like drawing a picture, cleaning up toys, or leaving a kind note. Reveal the surprise at the end of the day!
2. Joyful Music Helper Time
Turn on a fun song and clean something together — joyfully!
Talk about how helping with a happy heart feels different.
3. Joy Hand
Trace your child's hand on paper. On each finger, write or draw one way they can serve joyfully: helping, sharing, smiling, caring, and comforting. Hang the paper hand somewhere visible.

Prayer for the Week:

God, thank you for giving us joyful hearts. Help us serve others with smiles, kindness, and gladness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11, Galatians 5:13–14

Note to the Teacher:

This lesson focuses on what it means to serve joyfully, even when emotions are mixed or life feels heavy. The icebreaker gets students laughing and talking through a fast-paced, game-like challenge that highlights how joy can show up in unexpected ways. After reading scripture about serving one another through love, students discuss how joy is not something we manufacture but something that grows through shared action. The tactile activity invites students to physically build and reshape a spiral of service, helping them discover how joy, gratitude, grief, and trust can all exist together as part of a faithful community.

Supplies Needed:

- Small assorted objects (such as stones, blocks, rubber balls, keys, wooden pieces, or similar items)
- Small slips of paper (one per student)
- Pens or pencils

Icebreaker (10 min): “Joy Swap”

Give each student a small slip of paper and a pen. Ask them to write down one ordinary thing that brings them a little joy (for example, a song, a snack, a moment, a habit). Place all the papers in a container and mix them.

Students then each draw a paper at random. Going around the circle quickly, each student reads the joy they picked up and answers one question: “Would this bring you joy, and why or why not?” Then, have them guess which student wrote what is on their slip of paper. Encourage lighthearted responses and keep the pace moving. End by briefly noting how joy can look different for different people.

Bible Reading (5 min): Galatians 5:13–14

Discussion Questions (10 min):

- How does this scripture describe the relationship between freedom and service?
- What do you think it means to serve one another through love?
- What is it about serving others that often creates a sense of joy in the person serving?
- How does this passage make space for different emotions while still calling people to serve?
- Talk about a time when you experienced joy while serving others.
- How can our community help empower us to serve other people?

Active Learning Activity (20 min): “Holding Service Together”

Before the lesson, place a variety of small objects in the center of the room. These can include items with different weights, textures, or shapes (examples below).

Invite students to gather around the objects. Explain that some objects will represent ways people serve, and others will represent emotions that show up while serving.

Begin by asking students to choose an object that represents serving others in everyday life. Have them place their objects in the center to form a shared pile or cluster and explain what they reflect.

Next, give a second prompt and ask students to choose a different object that represents an emotion that can show up while serving, such as joy, gratitude, frustration, grief, or exhaustion. Ask them to place these objects around, on top of, or beside the service objects and explain what they reflect.

Emphasize that joyful service does not remove other emotions but is held together by community and trust in God’s grace.

Reflection Questions:

- What did you notice about how the objects worked together in the center?
- Which emotions felt important to include alongside service, and why?
- How does this activity change how you think about serving joyfully with others?

Examples of objects:

- Smooth stones or small rocks
- Wooden blocks or Jenga pieces
- Rubber balls or bouncy balls
- Keys or old key rings
- Coins
- Clothespins
- Small plastic cups
- Sponges
- Paperweights or small bookends
- LEGO bricks or similar building pieces

Prayer (5 min): Close the session in a manner traditional to or appropriate for your group.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11

Fellowship (10+ min): Snacks or a Meal

Gathering Time (5–10 min):

Frame your time by sharing the following: “The adverb for this week is *joyfully*, which is paired with *serving*. Serving others can sometimes be seen as hidden work or menial labor. In groups of two or three, answer these questions: ‘Whom do you know who seems to genuinely experience joy when serving others? Why do you think it brings them joy?’”

Group Dialogue (30 min):

Read the texts before responding to the questions below.

Read Psalm 100.

- How do you see joy bubbling up in the singer of this psalm?
- Imagine God’s response to this hymn.
- Based on this psalm, how could you define “joy”?
- At times, we don’t “feel” joyful. How do you grapple with the invitation to do something joyfully even when your heart does not “feel” joy?

Read 1 Peter 4:8–11.

- In this word of instruction for the early church, there are several tangible acts mentioned, with service explicitly mentioned twice (verses 10 and 11). How does the author of 1 Peter speak of service?
- What is the attitude connected with service in this passage?
- What is the result of this kind of service?
- How often do you connect God being praised through your service?

The Preaching Note for this week says,

We serve, or we are called to serve, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of giftedness and an awareness of the presence of Christ in our service. In our words, God speaks, says Peter; in our service, God’s strength is revealed. That is the source of the joy with which we serve—not in our own words or strength, but in the presence of Christ in our serving.

- What would it mean for our community if each of us used our gifts to serve others and to be aware of Christ’s presence as we serve?

After our discussion today, how do you connect serving with joy?

Just One Thing:

What is one thing you could do in the week ahead to embody what it means to serve joyfully?

Going Deeper on Your Own:

This week, consider studying one of the selected texts in the following pattern:

- Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to the scripture (Psalm 119:18).
- Read the text (Psalm 100, 1 Peter 4:8–11) out loud.

- What do you notice about the text?
- What questions arise?
- What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?

Prayer (10 min):

Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 min):

End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God of joy, we confess that we do not always serve others with joy. Will you invite us deeper into life with you, so that, Jesus, we can receive your Spirit of serving others and praise you with joy? Open our hearts and minds and shape our wills to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as we learn to walk more faithfully in your presence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

Though few of us may ever feel like we're standing on the banks of the Jordan with thousands of people waiting on us to lead them to the Promised Land, many of us have probably had a "Joshua moment" at some point in our lives, that moment when we know there's no turning back from the task ahead, and we have people waiting on us to lead the way. These are moments God calls us to lead courageously. But they're not the *only moments* we are called to lead courageously. In fact, when taken together, our scripture passages today paint a picture of leading courageously as *followers*.

Now, leading as followers might seem like a contradiction, but, in fact, this is what worship forms us to do. We come to worship to be formed and rehearse our identity as followers of Jesus Christ. Leading courageously, then, is not about singular, solitary, lone-wolf actions. Leading courageously is about listening to the hurts, joys, wisdom, and insights of the gathered body of Christ. Leading courageously is about praying honestly and frankly about the concerns of the world, paying attention to what God calls us to do in response, and then *acting with and for God's abundant life in our communities*. Leading courageously is recognizing that we do not have to be in charge to lead well and practicing the humility and generosity that mark good leadership. Think about your own experiences with theological education. How do those inform your approach to leading courageously? Consider how you might share your own journey with theological education to help illustrate the importance of providing theological education to United Methodist leaders around the world.

So, as you plan for this week of the series, consider how loving boldly and serving joyfully complement leading courageously. What stories of humble and generous leadership have shaped your church's life together? Tell them! What are the small "Joshua moments" that your congregants face every day or every week? Pray about them! What are the songs that feed your courage when it is flagging? Sing them! Help your congregation remember God's faithfulness to us when we must lead with courage. Give them a prayer, a song, or a brief meditation to carry with them to bolster their hearts and calm their spirits when leading courageously feels too risky. Then send them out with a blessing and affirmation that God, who calls us to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously, will never leave us or forsake us.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Take time each day this week to pray for the leaders in The United Methodist Church, including lay leaders, clergy, bishops, and theological educators all over the world. Ask God to show you one way you can join them in working for the flourishing of all.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of the "Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God's Children" initiative.

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

Joshua stands on the brink of an envisioned future, a promised future. But he stands alone. His mentor, Moses, the one who called him out of the mass of the wandering people, is gone. Joshua was sure he would live forever. Moses had that vibe. He was just always going to be around, to defer to, to lean on, to show the way. But now he was gone, and Joshua stands alone, wondering, needing...something. But what?

What does any leader need to proceed into the unknown future? The bishops suggest that at least one thing that is needed is courage. That's why they conclude their vision statement with a call to **Lead Courageously**. No one would argue that to be sure. But where does this adverbial quality come from? Most of us would assume it comes from within. It is a call to "man up" in modern parlance. Or like Lady MacBeth tells her husband when he wavers on the mission to kill the king and take the throne and wonders if he might fail:

"then we fail! But screw your courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail!" (Macbeth Act 1, Scene 7)

We might say it more simply these days, guided by a certain shoe manufacturer: "Just do it!" The sticking place is where the arrow finds purchase in the target. It is where it all happens, where it comes to be. When we find ourselves there, when we are driven by the goal, by the target, by the task itself, then courage is generated through an act of will or inner glandular response. Well, maybe. Certainly, there is a human component to the ability to act courageously. But our texts suggest another source.

Joshua might have felt alone as he stood there without Moses contemplating all that was before him. But the text reminds him and us that he isn't. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you," says the Lord. (*Joshua 1:5 NRSV*) "I will not fail you or forsake you." Presence, that is the beginning of courage. From the realization that the leader is not alone comes the ability to move forward, to make decisions, to do what needs to be done. Courage is the ability to act even in the face of the unknown.

There is a second component to courage in the Joshua text. "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you..." (*Joshua 1:7 NRSV*) Obedience is that second component that helps to generate the ability to lead courageously. Not a slavish obedience to a list of laws and procedures. But rather a relational knowledge of the vision of the people of God that has been cast in the commandments. Joshua is encouraged to meditate on this law, to know it intimately so that it becomes a part of him and he acts, he leads and chooses, not because it is written in a law, but because it is following the one who is present with him and equips him to lead.

That equipping is what Paul turns to in the famous passage itemizing the whole armor of God. There are plenty of commentaries that will examine each element of the armor and give insight into how it can help in moving forward in faith, to lead courageously. In this space let us draw attention to the fact that all these individual pieces are defensive, except for one. The bulk of the items mentioned here are about protection. They are about holding on to faith in difficult days. They are about being reminded that the work that lies ahead is not simply our work, not simply the church's work. It is God's work and God chooses to use us as instruments in the building up of the kingdom, in the creating of the kin-dom of faith and fellowship. We lead courageously when we acknowledge God's presence in our work and do all we can do to point beyond ourselves to the God who sustains us.

As for the offensive tools? Well, Paul only mentions one, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. It is interesting that he gives two names or descriptions for this one. It's almost as if he had an inkling of the trouble this might cause. Perhaps he had a vision of people wielding scripture like it was a weapon designed to wound, to cut people down, to destroy enemies. So, he doesn't start with scripture as weapon. He starts with the Spirit. It is the Spirit who wields the sword, not us. If there is any cutting down to be done, it is not our job, not our responsibility. It is the Spirit that convicts. Our job is to love. Our job is to welcome and include and bring folks into the fellowship of the people who are shaped by the word.

Our job, says Paul, is to pray at all times, and to lift up God's people in prayer. Our job is to lead courageously as we find new ways to be the people of God at work in the world. Our job is to lead courageously as we find new arenas and new people to hear the good news of God's grace. Our job is to lead courageously as we humbly follow the one who sends us out to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

But where might we start to lead? Or what ought to be our priorities? The bishops challenge us to think beyond being courageous in our local churches, and even in our local communities. We are encouraged to take a world view, a systemic view when we consider how to lead courageously. We are encouraged to take an Isaiah like vision and to let our worship and our spiritual discipline reach into the world around us, *to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke. (Isaiah 58:6 NRSV)*

A high and difficult calling, to be sure. And yet this is who we have always been. Our founder, John Wesley, from the beginnings of the Methodist movement set about challenging the oppressive systems on his time, sought to lift those marginalized by industrialization and unfair and unsustainable labor practices. We have always been a church who sought to bring transformation to the world, not simply of individuals or of the church. Our baptism vows call us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. To lead courageously is to acknowledge that this vow is not only about protecting ourselves, but about challenging those powers at work in the world and to invite others to find the freedom that Christ can bring.

Even here, especially here, in the hard labor of leading the church courageously, God will meet us, will make the divine presence known and thus strengthen our courage as we seek to do what seems impossible for us. And the light we follow begins to shine in and through us, that might all the more love boldly, serve joyfully and lead courageously.

WEEK 5 | Lead Courageously

MUSIC RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

THEME: *Strength and courage through God's presence; leading in faith.*

Traditional Hymns (*United Methodist Hymnal*, UMH)

- Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah (UMH 127)
- God of Grace and God of Glory (UMH 577)
- Lead On, O King Eternal (UMH 580)

The Faith We Sing (TFWS) / Worship and Song (W&S)

- We Are Marching (Siyahamba) (TFWS 2235–b)
- Your Grace Is Enough (W&S 3106)
- I Will Trust in the Lord (UMH 464)

African American / Gospel

- Guide My Feet (TFWS 2208)
- We've Come This Far by Faith (SOZ 192)
- Total Praise – Richard Smallwood
- I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (UMH 521)

Global Songs

- Thuma Mina (Send Me, Lord) (*African American Heritage Hymnal*, 564) – South Africa
- When the Storms of Life Are Raging (Stand by Me) (UMH 512) – African American heritage
- Canticle of Turning (Magnificat) – Rory Cooney/Irish traditional
- Christ Be Our Light – Bernadette Farrell (England)

Songs from *Songs of Zion* (SOZ)

- We've Come This Far by Faith (SOZ 192)
- Leaning on the Everlasting Arms (SOZ 53)

Modern Worship (CCLI)

- Oceans (Where Feet May Fail) – Hillsong UNITED
- Another in the Fire – Hillsong UNITED
- Battle Belongs – Phil Wickham
- Cornerstone – Hillsong Worship

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of God, on our journey of faith, we are not alone—God is with us!

Because God is with us, we can love boldly.

God is with us, and God joins us with one another as the Body of Christ.

Because God draws us together, we can serve joyfully.

Through God, we work for the flourishing of self, neighbor, and all creation.

Because God holds us together, we can lead courageously.

Family of God, on this journey of faith, we are not alone—God is with us!

We come to worship God by boldly loving, joyfully serving, and courageously leading, that we may be disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy One of mystery and power,
there is no God like you
in heaven above or on earth below,
keeping covenant and steadfast love
with all who walk before you
with pure and upright hearts.
Fill our lives with your glory,
as you filled the temple with cloud
when Solomon first brought the ark
into your holy dwelling place.
Give us the strength and the power
to withstand the forces of evil
at work in our lives and in our world. Amen.

Adapted from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009, © 2008 Abingdon Press. Reposted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/08/opening-prayer-proper-16-b.html>.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(Unison)

**Holy God, we come before You in humility,
For we do not live as we ought.**

**We do not love You with our whole heart and mind
and strength.**

We do not love our neighbor as ourselves.

So we pray, in all humility,

That You will change our hearts and minds,

**That You will show us again how to love others the
way You love us,**

**That You will put power and courage in our hearts
to do your will.**

Silent prayers of confession.

Assurance and Pardon

Receive this goodness:

Even when we wander, we are not alone.

God is with us wherever we go.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Glory to God! Amen.

*Adapted from Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good."
Used with permission. <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession>.*

BENEDICTION

May God bless you with the wisdom to notice the needs of your neighbors, the inspiration to know how to act, and the courage to lead the way in working for justice and flourishing for all God's creation. Amen.

WEEK 5 | Lead Courageously

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

Faithful God, you are our strength and our shield, our guide through seasons of uncertainty. You promise never to leave us nor forsake us, and in that promise, we find courage. As Joshua stepped forward in faith and as your people put on the armor of light, so we bring these gifts with boldness—offering not only what is in our hands, but also what is in our hearts. Use them, and us, to build your kingdom with justice and grace. Clothe us with truth, guard us with peace, and send us forward, leading courageously in your name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

Adverb: *Courageously*

Props: Paper “armor” pieces (shield, belt, shoes).

Message:

Good morning, friends! Today, we are going to learn about being leaders for God. Being a leader doesn't mean being bossy; it means doing the right thing, even when it's hard.

In our Bible verses for today, we hear about a man named Joshua. Joshua had a big job. He was going to lead God's people to a new place. He felt a little scared, just as we all do sometimes. But God said to him, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. I am with you wherever you go.”

Wow! God didn't just tell Joshua what to do; God told him how to do it: with courage. God told Joshua to live life courageously.

In our New Testament reading from Ephesians 6, we learn about the armor of God. The armor of God includes things like truth, faith, and peace, all of which help us be brave when we do what is right. God gives us everything we need to be courageous leaders.

Courageous. *Courageously*. I think we just discovered today's adverb.

Today's adverb is **courageously**. Can you say “courageously”? (*Children repeat the word.*) An adverb tells us **how** we do something, and today it tells us **how we lead**. When we lead *courageously*, we are **brave and strong because God is with us**.

Leading courageously means:

- Doing what's right, even when it's hard.
- Being brave, even when you feel scared.
- Helping others when they need a leader.
- Standing up for someone who is being hurt.
- Trusting God to be with you.

Let's all do a SUPERHERO pose — feet apart, shoulders back, hands on hips.

Can you stand like your favorite superhero? (*Children pose.*) That's our “God-made-me-brave” pose.

Let's practice! I have some pieces of armor: a shield, a belt, and shoes. Choose one or imagine one and think about how it can help you lead courageously. How could the “belt of truth” help you lead courageously?

What about the “shoes of peace”? How will the shoes prepare you to share the good news of peace as you lead? What about the “shield of faith”? (*Pause for responses.*)

Now, let's act out some situations:

- A friend has been left out of a game. Show me how you could invite that person in or say, “Come play with us!” (*Children act.*)
- Someone drops their toys. Show me how you could help them pick the toys up. (*Children act.*)
- A friend is nervous about speaking in front of the class. Show me how you could cheer them on with your hands or words. (*Children act.*)

Wow! Look at all the ways we can lead courageously — with our hands, voices, and hearts.

Let's do our **superhero pose** to remind ourselves that God is with us — feet apart, chest out, hands on hips. (*Children pose.*)

Let's say together: **"God is with me, so I can lead courageously!"**

And now, let's close with our blessing:

Blessing/Prayer:

Hold out your hands...

May the Holy Spirit guide you to love boldly.

May the example of Christ inspire you to serve joyfully.

May the strength of God's love empower you to lead courageously.

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Lead courageously.

Amen.

Between the Sundays: Family Conversation Starters and Activities

These questions and activities are designed to help families talk, play, and pray together during the week. They connect with the children's message shared on Sunday and help reinforce faith learning at home. Use them at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime — anytime your family is together.

They are simple, short, and open-ended, so children can respond in their own ways.

These conversations help grow faith in everyday moments and remind families that following Jesus happens all week long — not just on Sundays.

Theme: God helps us be brave when we do what is right.

Adverb: Courageously

Conversation Starters:

- What is something brave you did today?
- Who in our family led courageously this week?
- When is it hard to be brave? What helps you?
- How can we help someone who needs courage?

Family Activities:

1. Courage Quest

Go on a "Courage Quest" around your home and look for moments where you can be brave:

- Trying something new.
- Going first.
- Helping someone.
- Saying something kind.

2. Courage Pose Challenge

Stand tall with a superhero pose.

Say together: "God is with me — I can lead courageously!"

Repeat anytime someone in the family needs to be brave.

3. Paper Armor of God

Cut out simple pieces of paper armor (shield, belt, shoes). Your child can decorate them with colors or stickers. Talk about how God protects and strengthens us when we lead courageously.

Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, thank you for being with me. When I feel scared, help me be brave. Help me do what is right and kind. Help me lead courageously, even when it's hard. Thank you for loving me every day. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

Note to the Teacher:

This lesson explores what it means to lead courageously without needing control, certainty, or authority. The icebreaker uses a fast, playful guessing game to get students talking and laughing about influence and attention in low-stakes ways. After reading scripture about courage and strength rooted in God’s presence, students discuss how courageous leadership often looks like humility, listening, and shared responsibility. In the tactile activity, students work together to build and adapt a physical structure, discovering that leading courageously is less about being in charge and more about responding together when things change.

Supplies Needed:

Assorted materials to build a structure (blocks, Legos, paper, pipe cleaners, etc.)

Icebreaker (10 min): “Follow the Leader...or Not”

Have students sit or stand in a circle. Ask for one volunteer to step out of the room briefly. While that person is gone, quietly choose one person in the circle to be the “leader.”

The leader begins making small, subtle movements, such as tapping a foot, rubbing hands together, nodding, or changing posture. Everyone else must copy the movements as quickly as possible without making it obvious who they are following.

Bring the volunteer back into the room. That person’s job is to stand in the middle and try to figure out who the leader is while the group continues to follow the movements. Give the volunteer up to three guesses.

After the round, briefly ask:

- Was it harder or easier than you expected to figure out who was leading?
- What made it tricky?

Bible Reading (5 min): Joshua 1:5–9 & Ephesians 6:10–18

Discussion Questions (10 min):

- What words or images from these passages stood out?
- What do these scriptures say about where strength and courage come from?
- Do you think courage is connected to trust rather than control? Why?
- What does courage look like, in your opinion?
- Talk about a time you have seen leadership that was quiet, humble, or shared.
- How do loving boldly and serving joyfully support leading courageously?
- What makes leading courageously feel risky for people your age?

Active Learning Activity (20 min): “Build and Adjust”

Divide students into small groups and give each group a set of simple building materials. Their task is to build the tallest free-standing structure they can in five minutes.

Halfway through, pause the groups and introduce a change. Examples include:

- One person must step back and stop touching the materials.
- The structure must now survive a gentle shake of the table or floor.
- One new rule must be added that the group chooses together.

Groups then continue building with the new condition. After the time is up, invite groups to look around the room and notice how each team adapted, then have them take out a measuring tape to measure each structure’s height. Emphasize that courageous leadership is not about domination or perfection but about listening, adjusting, and moving forward together when circumstances change.

Reflection Questions:

- What changed in your group when the conditions shifted?
- Who led during the adjustment, and how did that leadership show up?
- What does this activity reveal about leading courageously as followers?

Prayer (5 min): Close the session in a manner traditional to or appropriate for your group.

WEEK 5 | Lead Courageously

SMALL GROUPS

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:5–9, Ephesians 6:10–18

Fellowship (10+ min): Snacks or a Meal

Gathering Time (5–10 min):

Frame your time by sharing the following: “The final adverb we’re exploring is *courageously*, which is combined with leading. Knowing that a person can exercise leadership anytime and anywhere, share with one or two other people about a time where you saw someone exhibit courage that made an impact on the situation.”

Group Dialogue (30 min):

Read the texts before responding to the questions below.

Read Joshua 1:5–9.

- Joshua was a younger leader who succeeded Moses upon his death. Three times in this short passage, we see the same admonition from the Lord, “Be strong and courageous” (vv. 6, 7, 9, NRSVUE). What is connected to each of the three encouragements? [Invite group participants to name what they see related to each occurrence; then share the information in the chart below.]

VERSE	CONNECTION	ORIENTATION OF TIME	THEME
“Be strong and courageous” (v. 6).	“You shall lead this people to possess the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them” (This was promised to Abraham in Genesis 15).	Past	God keeps promises about the land.
“Be strong and very courageous” (v. 7).	“Being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded... shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.”	Present	The book of the Law would lead to life.
“Be strong and courageous” (v. 9).	“For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”	Present & Future	God’s presence goes with God’s people.

- Imagine being Joshua receiving this word from the Lord three times; then consider these three important themes from the Old Testament: “Be strong and courageous” is more than a “pep talk”; the words orient him in the present for a future that will be very demanding. When has a word of encouragement oriented you for something difficult?
- The final encouragement reminds Joshua that God will be with him. How have you experienced God’s presence in a difficult time?

Read Isaiah 58:6–10.

The spiritual practice of fasting is connected with breaking bonds of injustice.

- How do you understand fasting from this text?
- How could it relate to courage?

Read Ephesians 6:10–18.

The “armor of God” is another way of being prepared. Look closely at the text to see how many of the pieces of armor are defensive and how many are offensive.

- How do these pieces of “armor” equip you for leadership today?
- Is there a particular “piece of armor” that you would like to experience in your life? Why?

The Preaching Note for this week says,

It is interesting that [Paul] gives two names or descriptions for “[the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God].” It’s almost as if he had an inkling of the trouble this might cause. Perhaps he had a vision of people wielding scripture like a weapon designed to wound, cut people down, and destroy enemies. So, he doesn’t start with scripture as a weapon. He starts with the Spirit. It is the Spirit who wields the sword, not us.

- What do you think it means for the Spirit to “wield the sword” instead of us being the ones who wield it? How does “the word of God” do that?

Read Psalm 27:1–3, 14.

- These words from the psalmist proclaim God as the source of courage. Which words speak to you most impactfully? Consider writing them down to use as an affirmation of courage this week.

After our discussion today, how do you connect leadership with courage?

Just One Thing:

What is one thing you could do in the week ahead to embody what it means to lead courageously?

Going Deeper on Your Own:

This week, consider studying one of the selected texts in the following pattern:

- Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to the scripture (Psalm 119:18).
- Read the text (Joshua 1:5–9, Isaiah 58:6–10, Psalm 27:1–3, 14, or Ephesians 6:10–18) out loud.
- What do you notice about the text?
- What questions arise?
- What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?

Prayer (10 min):

Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 min):

End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Giver of courage, we confess that we need your encouragement to be strong and courageous. Will you equip us with your strength, encircle us with your truth, cover us with your righteousness, and make us ready to share your gospel of peace? We want to be people of true faith, trusting you to protect us from all forces against you. Heal us and form us according to your word. Open our hearts and minds and shape our wills to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as we learn to walk more faithfully in your presence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

Our gospel text today takes us to the mountain with the Resurrected Christ and the disciples. All are poised on the edge of a question: “What now?” And Jesus’ answer is *go*. Go and transform the world (my paraphrase). No pressure, right?! But we don’t go alone. Disciples transform the world *together*.

Throughout this series, the weekly “Call to Discipleship” has encouraged congregants to notice what’s happening in their local community and discover how they can live out their discipleship in their context. This week, find ways to expand this call to notice and respond on a global scale. Sing songs from the worldwide United Methodist Church. Pray with the voices of people throughout the United Methodist connection. Preach about the connectional nature of the church and remind your congregation that they do not have to transform the world on their own. Our strength is in our togetherness on this journey of discipleship.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Spend time in prayer this week, asking God to show you where God is calling you to go and live as a disciple who loves boldly, serves joyfully, and leads courageously. Share what you notice in prayer with a trusted friend or pastor. What is one step you can take to go and do what God is calling you to do?

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of the “Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God’s Children” initiative.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

We've come at last to the Great Commission, the call to go—to love boldly, to serve joyfully, and to lead courageously. Our work is laid out for us, for the whole church. But take a moment to look at the context for the charge. Jump to the end, for example. The final word is important and comforting, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Great stuff. Necessary stuff. Thanks be to God stuff. A reminder that all that we do we do in the presence of the Christ who calls us.

But what about the beginning of the passage? There are a couple of things we need to hear there too. There are a couple of conflicting modes, or attitudes or something in there. First of all, there is that glaring statement “the eleven disciples.” It is a new reality, a new mode of being expressed in a simple description. For three years they were twelve. Or twelve plus, there was always a crowd that followed. But now there is eleven. The passion was not just something for Christ to experience, it had ripple effects that touched other lives, that reordered existence. Because of what Christ has done, things are different.

The Gospel of John emphasizes the fear of the remaining disciples. He talks of the locked room and the hiding out. Matthew tells us that even if that were true, even if fear gripped them—and why wouldn't it?—they were still followers of Jesus Christ. Even before they got this final great commission, they went to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. They didn't just wander aimlessly and find themselves by a happy accident where Jesus wanted them to be. They chose, even in spite of their fear, they chose to go where Jesus sent them.

“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” There it is. Worship and doubt sitting there side by side. It doesn't fit into our understanding. Worship is about certainty, it is about will and choice and commitment. Doubt is something else entirely. It is what keeps us from worship. It is what makes us fall by the wayside and give up, because nothing makes sense any more and we just aren't sure. In our heads we misread this verse, I think. We read that there were some there who didn't doubt and they worshiped and there were some there who did doubt and therefore didn't worship. Right? At least that would make some sense. OK, they showed up. They put in their pew time, but there is no way that they could have worshiped because they doubted. You can't have those things together. Right?

One of the first implications of this verse is that we no longer have an excuse for our own doubts. Sometimes we are inclined to say, or to think if we never are brave enough to articulate it, that if only we could see Jesus face to face then there wouldn't be any room for doubt. We are jealous of those guys who got to hear his human voice and see his human face and touch his human hands. And we think if only we were given that gift, then we wouldn't have worry about doubt anymore. But verse 17 tells us that we would be wrong about that. These guys saw him face to face and still some doubted.

The odd thing is that there is another way to translate the last phrase. In fact the “some” that has been included is an assumption. And we've assumed it was related to the disciples—some of them doubted. But what it might have meant is that there was some doubt. They worshiped, they all worshiped, but there was some doubt. Even in the worshipers. Even in those who were ready to give themselves, to receive the commission, to go where he directed them, there was still some doubt.

Doubt need not be understood as the opposite of faith or of worship. In fact, it might simply be the human side of worship. The human side of worship is the recognition that there is more going on here than I can figure out. The human side of worship is the acknowledgment that I have no idea what all the implications are of my songs of praise, that I am not sure on where I need to go next to live out my prayers for peace, that I don't know even know what is being asked of me or even who it is doing the asking. Doubt in this case might refer to the realization that there just might be moments in front of me that I have never in my wildest dreams even contemplated and the fear that I might not be up to the challenge. Is that the opposite of worship? Maybe. But I don't think so. If we are really worshiping the God of all things, if we are really placing ourselves in the

presence of the Creator of the Universe, if we are really claiming the name of the Eternal Word through whom all things that are made were made, then it only makes sense that we have to acknowledge the limits of our human capacity to comprehend or even imagine. We can, and do, worship and doubt at the same time.

The key is to not let doubt determine the willingness to serve. A part of the doubt came from the fact that the worshiping preceded the commission. They wondered what they should do next, and Jesus, who knew they wondered, told them. Go, disciple the nations, baptize into the community, teach what I have placed in you to teach. Ah, now I see. But did they? Luke's story in the Acts of the Apostles indicates that they didn't even see then. "Surely he didn't mean all the nations, did he?" Yep. They were still learning. And teaching. And worshiping. And doubting.

So, Paul says give everything to this task. Romans 12 begins with the idea that God wants all of us. Each of us, yes, but all of each of us. All of you, all of me. God wants it all. So, present your bodies! Paul means literally that, present them. Offer your whole being to God for service, for worship, for transformation, for all of it. And don't get caught up in serving like the world does, serve like Christ does, not for return, not for gain, but for love.

The second thought from this text is the idea that Paul returns to again and again. We have gifts that differ, he says in this passage. We all are different parts, he says in other places. But we give them and share them, these gifts. We give them away for the joy of others, for laughter and for tears. We serve together as a part of a community. We grow together, learning from one another and helping one another to learn. We sing and we worship together, we break bread and tell stories together, we let one another into our lives in sometimes surprising depth because we are open to the Spirit at work in each of us. And we do our best to find ways to let this spill out into the world around us.

That's how the world changes, by the ripples from committed individuals and groups who are seeking the kingdom, seeking to bring to life the vision of living in community that Jesus described throughout his ministry.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

There are some questions about whether this is an actual quote from the cultural anthropologist, Mead. But if anyone can give witness to the truth of such a statement, it is those who are disciples of Jesus and who stand in the tradition of a small group of worshiping doubters, or doubting worshipers who empowered by the Spirit launched a movement that did indeed change the world. And we might add that they did it with a song, with a gospel of invitation and inclusion. This is the new song the psalmist writes of in Psalm 96. A song that will change the world, but only if we sing it to the nations, to all of creation. Only if we live it as we sing it. Only if we sing it invitationally. Only if we are willing to go anywhere, and everywhere to sing the new song of glory to God and inclusion and grace.

WEEK 6 | Disciples Transform the World

MUSIC RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

THEME: *Living out our Spirit-given gifts to praise God, serve others, and join Christ in transforming the world.*

Traditional Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal, UMH)

- O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing (UMH 57)
- Take My Life, and Let It Be (UMH 399)
- The Gift of Love (UMH 408)
- Here I Am, Lord (UMH 593)
- We Are the Church (UMH 558)
- Go, Make of All Disciples (UMH 571)

The Faith We Sing (TFWS) / Worship and Song (W&S) / United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)

- We Are Marching/Siyahamba (TFWS 2235–b)
- Many Gifts, One Spirit (UMH 114)
- Bring Forth the Kingdom (TFWS 2190)
- God of Wonders (W&S 3034)

African American / Gospel

- Every Time I Feel the Spirit (UMH 404)
- I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me (TFWS, 2153)
- Total Praise – Richard Smallwood (commonly licensed through CCLI)

Global Songs

- Jesus, We Are Here/Jesu Tawa Pano (TFWS 2273) – Zimbabwe
- Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo / We Are the Body of Christ (Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/dios_viene_al_mundo_a_traves_de_nosotros) – Latin American
- Halle, Halle, Hallelujah (TFWS 2026) – Caribbean
- Cantemos al Señor/O Sing to the Lord (UMH 149)

Songs from Songs of Zion (SOZ)

- We've Come This Far by Faith (SOZ 192)
- God Is So Good (SOZ 231)

Modern Worship (CCLI)

- Build Your Kingdom Here – Rend Collective
- God of This City – Chris Tomlin/Bluetree
- The Blessing – Elevation Worship/Kari Jobe/Cody Carnes
- Way Maker – Sinach/Leeland version

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of God, who are you?

We are disciples, formed by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Family of God, why do you gather?

To worship God who loves us and teaches us to love our neighbors, ourselves, and all creation.

Family of God, how do you worship God?

By loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously.

Family of God, receive this good news: in our loving, our serving, and our leading, we are not alone—God is with us!

We come to worship God by loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously in our community and through our worldwide connections, that we may be disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God,
Maker of heaven and earth,
we gather together in Your name.
We come as living sacrifices,
to offer You our worship and thanksgiving,
our praise and our prayers.
Come among us, living Lord.
Through the power of Your Holy Spirit,
transform our hearts and minds
so that we may encounter Your presence,
recognize Your voice,
know Your will,
and follow in Your way.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Savior.
Amen.

Adapted from Opening Prayer: Proper 16A on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/08/opening-prayer-proper-16a.html>.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(Unison)

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.**

We have failed to be an obedient church.

**We have not done your will,
we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.**

Forgive us, we pray.

**Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
that we may live as disciples who transform the world.**

Amen.

Silent prayers of confession.

Receive the good news:
Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Glory to God. Amen.**

Adapted from "A Service of Word and Table I," in The United Methodist Book of Worship. Copyright © 1972, The Methodist Publishing House; Copyright © 1980, 1985, 1989, 1992 UMPH.

BENEDICTION

Go now in the blessing of God, who equips and empowers you to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as disciples of Jesus Christ, remembering that in all things, we are not alone—God is with us! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026.

WEEK 6 | Disciples Transform the World

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

Commissioning Christ, you meet us on the mountain where worship and doubt share the same ground. You call us not because we are certain, but because you are faithful. As we offer these gifts, we offer ourselves—our questions and our courage, our fears and our hopes. Use what we bring to form disciples, to teach with humility, to baptize with joy, and to share a song of grace that reaches every nation. Send us where you will, trusting your promise to be with us always. Shape this offering into witness and welcome, so that love may be known, community may be formed, and the world may be changed through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Matthew 28:16–20)

WEEK 6 | Disciples Transform the World

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

Adverb: *Boldly*

Props: Globe or world map; small stickers or paper hearts for children to place on the map; toy megaphone or “mission scroll.”

Message:

Good morning, friends! Today, we are going to think about how we can share God’s love with the world. Look at this globe (*or map*)! Wow, so many places and people to love!

In Matthew 28, Jesus told his friends, “Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

That’s a big job! It might feel a little scary or hard. But God promises to be with us wherever we go. And today’s special word tells us how we can go; we can go **boldly**!

Romans 12 reminds us that each of us has special gifts. Some of us can teach; some can help; some can encourage others. When we use our gifts and share God’s love, we are going **boldly**, doing good things even when it’s new or different.

So, what does going boldly mean?

- We share God’s love, even with people we don’t know.
- We help others, even when it’s hard.
- We use our gifts to make the world better.
- We trust that Jesus is with us wherever we go.

Let’s do something fun. I have a globe and some stickers (*or paper hearts*). Each of you can put a sticker on a place you want to pray for, or where you hope God’s love can be shared. As you place your sticker, imagine yourself going boldly to share God’s love in that place!

(Pause for children to place stickers.)

Wow! Look at all the places you’re helping with God’s love. That is what it means to transform the world—going boldly with Jesus.

Now, let’s pretend we have a megaphone or mission scroll. Can you say with me:

“I will go boldly and share God’s love!” *(Children repeat.)*

Blessing/Prayer:

Hold out your hands like you’re ready to receive a gift...

May the Holy Spirit guide you to love boldly.

May the example of Christ inspire you to serve joyfully.

May the strength of God’s love empower you to go boldly in the world.

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Go boldly.

Amen.

Between the Sundays: Family Conversation Starters and Activities

These questions and activities are designed to help families talk, play, and pray together during the week. They connect with the children’s message shared on Sunday and help reinforce faith learning at home. Use them at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime — anytime your family is together.

They are simple, short, and open-ended, so children can respond in their own ways.

These conversations help grow faith in everyday moments and remind families that following Jesus happens all week long — not just on Sundays.

Theme: We go boldly to share God's love.

Adverb: *Boldly*

Conversation Starters:

- What is one way you could share God's love this week?
- Where do you see God at work in the world?
- How can we go boldly, even when something feels new or hard?
- What gifts has God given you to help others?

Family Activities:

1. World Sticker Map
 - Place a globe or map on a table or wall.
 - Family members can place a sticker on a place they want to pray for or where they hope to share God's love.
 - Talk about going boldly: "We can share God's love even far away or in new ways!"
2. Bold Adventure Walk
 - Take a family walk around your neighborhood. Notice opportunities to share God's love boldly, smiling at neighbors, picking up trash, or helping a friend.
 - Talk about each small action as a way of going boldly with Jesus.
3. Mission Megaphone or Scroll
 - Use a toy megaphone, paper cone, or "mission scroll."
 - Have each family member say one way they will go boldly this week to love or help someone.
 - Hang the scroll or keep it as a reminder.

Prayer for the Week:

God, thank you for being with us. Make our hearts brave and help us go boldly into the world as disciples. Amen.

WEEK 6 | Disciples Transform the World

YOUTH MESSAGE

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

Note to the Teacher:

This lesson focuses on Jesus' call to go and participate in transforming the world. The icebreaker uses a playful, fast-paced game to help students experience how shared movement and cooperation matter more than perfection. After reading scripture about being sent and using our gifts within the body of Christ, students discuss how transformation happens through community rather than individual effort. In the activity, students move around the room to explore different areas of the world that need transformation, discovering that disciples respond to God's call in many ways while remaining part of one shared mission.

Supplies Needed:

- Coins, tokens, or small identical objects for the icebreaker (one per student)
- Paper or posterboard with single words written on them (one per station)
- Tape to secure station signs
- Markers for each station
- Sticky notes for each station (hopefully of different colors)

Icebreaker (10 min):

Give each student a coin, token, or small object. Have students stand or sit in a circle. Explain that the goal is to pass all the objects around the circle as quickly as possible, starting by passing them to the right. When they pass the object, they have to say what the object is when they hand it to the next person. Of course, there is a twist: you will call out simple rules as the game goes on. Choose a person to be the first to receive an item, hand it to that person, and start the game. Continue by handing objects to different students every once in a while.

Example Rules:

- Pass with your non-dominant hand.
- Skip a person as you pass.
- Pass while making eye contact the entire time.
- Pass to the left.
- Pass by tossing the item to someone across the circle.
- Pass with your eyes closed.

Let the group laugh through the chaos for about a minute, then stop and ask one quick question: "What helped the group keep things moving even when it got messy?"

Bible Reading (5 min): Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, and Matthew 28:16–20

Discussion Questions (10 min):

- How does Romans describe the importance of different gifts working together?
- What do these passages say about being sent or going out into the world?
- What feels exciting about the idea of transforming the world?
- What feels overwhelming or intimidating about it?
- Why do you think Jesus sends the disciples out together rather than alone?
- Where do you already see small actions making a difference in the world around you?
- What might "transforming the world" look like in your ordinary, everyday lives?

Active Learning Activity (20 min): "Go and Send"

Clear a large open space in the room. Create several stations by placing signs or pieces of paper on the wall with single words written on them (examples below). Have sticky notes in various colors and markers at each station as well. These words should represent different ways the world can be transformed.

Example Words to Use:

- Healing
- Justice
- Compassion
- Learning
- Peace
- Belonging
- Hope
- Courage

Explain that each station represents a place where transformation is needed in the world.

Begin by inviting students to move freely around the room. When you say “go,” students walk to the word that feels most meaningful or urgent to them and write a word or draw a symbol that symbolizes an action someone can take to bring that word into their world. Have students place their notes on the wall around the sign.

After sharing, call “Go” again, invite students to move to another word that matters to them. Repeat for two or three rounds.

Close by saying that disciples are sent into many places with many gifts, but always together.

Reflection Questions:

- What did you notice about which words drew people in?
- How did it feel to move more than once instead of choosing only one place?
- What does this activity reveal about how disciples transform the world together?

Prayer (5 min): Close the session in a manner traditional to or appropriate for your group.

WEEK 6 | Disciples Transform the World

SMALL GROUPS

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, Matthew 28:16–20

Fellowship (10+ min): Snacks or a Meal

Gathering Time (5–10 min):

Ask participants to discuss the following question in groups of two or three: “On a scale of one to ten (with one being the least, and ten being the most), how much belief do you have that God can transform the world? Why did you rate it that way?”

Group Dialogue (30 min):

Read the texts before responding to the questions below.

Read Matthew 28:16–20.

- In this passage, belief and faith sit side by side: “When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted” (v. 17, NRSVUE). How do you understand this?
- Identify the words of affirmation that Jesus gives in this passage that we often describe as “The Great Commission.”
- What does this passage say about worship?
- What would it look like to nurture belief and defy doubt in your life?

Read Romans 12:1–8.

- What does this passage say about worship?
- Read verse two again aloud. How do you understand “renewing of the mind”? Why is it something that is worthy of exploring?
- Several spiritual gifts are named in this text. Do you see any of those gifts in one another? In yourself? What could it mean for those gifts to be used in your community?

Read Psalm 96.

- What are words or acts of worship in this psalm?
- Psalm 96 is a psalm that invites “all the earth,” “the nations,” and “all the peoples” to sing songs of praise or declare God’s glory. Later, the psalm says that the earth itself will rejoice (the sea, the field, the forest, etc.). What do you make of the magnitude of worship from this psalm?

The Preaching Note for this week says,

We’ve come at last to the Great Commission, the call to go – to love boldly, to serve joyfully, and to lead courageously. Our work is laid out for us, for the whole church. But take a moment to look at the context for the charge. Jump to the end, for example. The final word is important and comforting, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Great stuff. Necessary stuff. Thanks be to God stuff. A reminder that all that we do we do in the presence of the Christ who calls us.

- How do you understand or experience God’s presence with you in your day-to-day life?

Just One Thing:

Think again about the number (on a scale of one to ten) that you gave at the beginning to name your belief that God can transform the world. What is one thing you could do in the week ahead to grow in your faith and defy your doubt?

Going Deeper on Your Own:

This week, consider studying one of the selected texts in the following pattern:

- Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to the scripture (Psalm 119:18).
- Read the text (Psalm 96, Romans 12:1–8, or Matthew 28:16–20) out loud.
- What do you notice about the text?
- What questions arise?
- What do you think God might be saying to you through this text?

Prayer (10 min):

Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 min):

End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God of transformation, you are worthy of all our praise! Help us give you our very lives, and when we doubt, renew our minds. Open our hearts and minds and shape our wills to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as we learn to walk more faithfully in your presence. Amen.