

What We Believe

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A layperson's guide to the theology
of the Church of the Nazarene

Teacher's Guide

Introduction: How to Use this Guide

As most of you are no doubt aware, a *Teacher's Guide* is somewhat different from a *Sunday School Lesson*. A *Sunday School Lesson*, if it is well done, contains everything you need to lead a successful small group session. A *Teacher's Guide*, however, is simply a supplement to the actual material being studied.

That said, I have one small request—read the book.

I know my book isn't the *greatest* book on theology, but it is almost certainly the *shortest*, so I'm not asking much—maybe 10-15 minutes per chapter—so, please?

Each session in this guide is based on a chapter of the book. Most chapters, though, have more content that can be covered in a single session, particularly if you want to have discussion—which is kind of the point of a small group.

That's where this *Teacher's Guide* comes in. For each session, I have identified key points, offered a few summarizing statements, and then provided some discussion questions. My intent is to help you distill each chapter down to a teachable moment.

Now, you know your group better than I do. You know where they are starting from and how far you can take them in a single session. You may find my outline to be too much or too little for your group. My discussion questions may seem too simple or too advanced.

So please adapt, adjust, enhance, or subtract from what I've provided so that your group can get the most out of your time together. The goal is that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature” (Ephesians 4:13).

Which brings up an important point.

In writing this book and these lessons, I have intentionally avoided addressing other theological traditions either to compare, contrast, or discredit what others believe. The goal of this book and this series of lessons is not *persuasion* or *comparison* but *understanding*.

In other words, the underlying question behind every chapter is not, “Do I agree?” but “Do I understand?”

As small group leaders, you will face a challenge. No doubt most of your groups will contain people who come from other theological traditions. You will also have people who have been getting their theology from Google, YouTube, and Lifeway Bible Studies which are based on many different traditions and, as a result, have created a disembodied collection of beliefs with no theological foundation at all. As my friend Steve says, we're all theologians—we're just not all good theologians.

Everyone comes to church with some ideas about God.

So, here's the hard part. Try not to let the discussion devolve into debate.

Why?

Because endless debates over subtle differences of opinion are what make most people walk away from any sort of conversation about theology. Sure, some people love a good intellectual argument over the nuances of theology, but it just makes most people uncomfortable. It may seem invigorating to the handful of people participating, but for everyone else, it's just painful.

In an AI world where people are offered all sorts of opinions on every question, it's never been more important for Christians to have a solid foundation of beliefs rooted in a time-tested theological tradition, yet most of our people have never been exposed to a systematic presentation of any tradition at all. The purpose of this book and this study is to provide such a foundation.

Is it perfect? Nope.

Is it the only possible foundation? Nope.

Are there other valid theological traditions? Yup.

For people first wading into the ocean of theological thought, though, they have to start somewhere. If the first thing they encounter is a nuanced debate over the nature of the Trinity...they'll stay on the beach forever.

This is a primer, not an advanced theological discussion. Let's create a safe space for people to begin to understand what it means to be part of a theological tradition as opposed to trying to sort through all the different views and opinions on their own.

Let your sessions be bathed in prayer, filled with the Holy Spirit, and tempered by patience and love for God and for one another.

I'll finish with a quick story.

My wife asked me to build a goat shed. Yeah, that says it all right there. I have a strange life.

Anyway, I didn't know how to build a goat shed, so I did what we all do these days. I looked it up on YouTube. The first "expert" I watched said I MUST use treated wood or else the shed would fall apart. The second "expert" said to AVOID treated wood because the goats will chew on it and die. The third "expert" said the wood didn't matter. Just go CHEAP. It's a goat shed, not the Taj Mahal.

So, what do you do when the experts disagree?

- 1) Well, you can give up...which is sort of my favorite but not an option here.
- 2) You choose one and just go with them.
- 3) You can take the salad bar approach and just pick and choose what you like from each expert.

I went full on salad bar with my goat shed. I built the outside using treated wood, used untreated wood on the inside, and scrap for everything else.

So, of course the goats only chew on the outside treated wood...oh, and the screws.

Because...they're goats. No goats have died yet, but if they do, I'm betting it will be because of the screws.

My point is, I believe most of our people are taking the salad bar approach to understanding who God is, who we are, why we're here, and what we're supposed to be doing. They're picking and choosing random ideas from among a bunch of experts who don't agree with one another based on what makes the most sense to them.

It doesn't work.

First, I'm not sure we can trust "what makes sense" to us individually. We can't all be our own little theological traditions. Not if we want to be the church God has called us to be. We need unity of faith.

Second, theology isn't like Build-A-Bear. Not all ideas about God go together. For example, I've heard the same person say, "Yes, I believe God is good, loving, gracious, and kind" one moment and then say, "Ugh, I have a flat tire. You know, God's punishing me because I lied to Frank yesterday."

When it comes to questions about God, we have the same three choices I had with getting help with my goat shed.

- 1) Give up.
- 2) Choose one tradition and go with it.
- 3) Take the salad bar approach.

To have a faith that can stand in our pluralistic, post-Christian culture, our only hope is to take the middle option: Choose a tradition and go with it. It's hard... it's counter-culture...it's even a bit risky. But I believe our Wesleyan/Holiness tradition as practiced by the Church of the Nazarene offers a way of thinking and talking about God that is trustworthy, true, and transformational.

I'm guessing you do, too, or you'd be teaching something else.

So, let's give our people something solid that they can trust to help them navigate our crazy world full of false narratives and dead-end paths as we journey together towards the kingdom of God.

Let's tell them what we believe.

Session One: How Can We Know Anything About God?

Key Objectives:

- Christianity is a revelation-dependent religion.
- Prevenient Grace is what makes us capable of both knowing about God and knowing God.
- Understanding God's self-revelation requires the Holy Spirit working through Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.

Part One: We Believe in God

"We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth."—The Apostle's Creed

Even in our post-modern, pluralistic culture, belief in God, gods, or some sort of higher power persists. According to recent surveys, as many as 90% of people in the US believe in a higher power. However, only a slim majority believe in the God of the Christian Bible.

Question: Why do you think people still believe in some sort of God or gods?

Question: There are over 4,000 religions worldwide. If there is only one God, why are there so many different "gods" and "religions"?

Three Important Concepts:

1. ***Transcendence***—God is far above and beyond our ability to discover him or know anything about him on our own. We have about as much chance of finding and knowing God on our own as an ant has of understanding a car. God is altogether *different* from us.
2. ***Revelation***—While God is *different* from us, he is not *distant* from us. He has revealed himself to humankind in two ways:
 - *General Revelation*—God has revealed himself through the things he has made. Through natural revelation, we may know there is a God, but we can't know much about him. Natural revelation can only take us so far, which is how you end up with 4,000 different religions.
 - *Special Revelation*—God has also revealed himself through the story of his actions in the world as recorded in the Bible. In addition, God continues to reveal himself through the Holy Spirit at work in and through the Church. It is this more specific revelation that leads to faith in the Christian God of the Bible.
3. ***Prevenient Grace***—We believe God has placed within us a God-given, God-sustained capacity both to know about God and to know God. Prevenient grace is how God draws us to himself. We believe God's prevenient grace is at work in the world drawing all people to God. But because natural revelation can only take us so far, we need God's special revelation if we are to truly know him and become like him.

Part Two: The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Knowing and understanding God's special revelation requires *Scripture*, *Tradition*, *Reason*, and *Experience*. These four Spirit-filled gifts of God come together to help us know who God is, who we are, and how to live as the Born-Again Children of God.

1. *Scripture*

Jesus Christ is the highest revelation of what God is like. Jesus is the *Living Word* of God (John 1:1-4).

The Bible is where we discover the story of Jesus including all the interactions God had with the Hebrew people to bring about the coming of Jesus. The Bible is the *Written Word* about the *Living Word*. While we revere the Bible, we don't worship the Bible. The whole point of the *Written Word* is to lead us to the *Living Word*.

The Bible isn't a collection of wise sayings or spiritual imperatives that tell us exactly what to believe or how to live. The Bible is written using what is called *theological narrative*. In other words, it is the story of God. This leads to a couple of important points:

1. As a story, the Bible must be taken as a whole. You can't simply grab verses out of context and apply them however you want. It is the story of God, and so you must go from the "general to the specific" to interpret it correctly. So, you shouldn't ask, "What does this verse tell us about God?" You must always ask, "How does the story of God help us understand this verse?"
2. Because the Bible uses theological narrative, it requires a unique set of tools to interpret God's special revelation correctly. Those tools are *tradition*, *reason*, and *experience*.

Question: Do you read the Bible? When you read the Bible, do you tend to read short passages or seek out favorite verses? Do you ever simply read the Bible as a story? Are you perhaps a little guilty of going from the "specific to the general"?

2. *Tradition*

The Bible is a story that comes out of a specific tradition. That tradition is as much a part of the story as the written words themselves. It is critically important then, when reading the Bible, to see ourselves as part of a long tradition that goes all the way back in time to when our Bible was written. How have these stories traditionally been understood? How has the church interpreted the whole story of God? What beliefs and practices have emerged over time as the church, led by the Holy Spirit, has faithfully read and interpreted the story of God?

Question: When you hear the word "tradition," does it produce negative or positive emotions? Can you think of any traditions in your church that go back to the ancient church?

3. Reason

Reason is a dangerous tool to bring out of the toolbox. Romans 1:18-23 warns us that our unredeemed minds are pretty messed up. However, Romans 12:1-2 tells us that our minds can be healed, redeemed, and renewed so that we can know and understand the will of God.

Bringing our redeemed minds to Scripture and Tradition is a critical part of understanding what it means to be Christian. To build beliefs and practices from the story of God takes careful study of what Scripture says (*exegesis*), what Scripture means (*theology*), and what beliefs and practices emerge from the story of God as a whole (*orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*).

Question: Why is reason a dangerous tool to apply to Scripture and Tradition? Do we have to leave our brains behind to believe in God?*

**This is a tough question. As we learned in the first week, God is far beyond our capability to understand. As Wesley often said, faith is more than “mental assent to a series of philosophical propositions.” It is a gift from God. We don’t check our brains at the door, but only God, through the Holy Spirit and the means of grace, can truly change our minds. Before God’s presence changes us, we’re literally not thinking clearly (Romans 1:18-23).*

4. Experience

We believe the same Holy Spirit that inspired the authors of the Bible is present with us as we read the Bible. Everything we do as believers is Spirit-led. Our faith is more than a dusty collection of old beliefs and practices handed down by unthinking, uncritical, blind followers. Christianity is the fresh, living, dynamic, ongoing revelation of God working by the Holy Spirit in and through the Church.

God is still at work in the world revealing himself to and through his people. Now, we believe this ongoing revelation must be consistent with Scripture and Tradition, but God helps us interpret what it means to be his people in our world today. Scripture, Tradition, and Reason work together to help us test our present-day Experience as we seek to maintain our ties to the long line of those who have gone before us and faithfully pass on our beliefs to the next generation.

Question: Do you believe God is still at work revealing himself to the world today? Can you name a specific way you’ve seen God reveal himself this week?

Close by Reading Hebrews 12:1-3

Session Two: What Is God Like?

Key Objectives:

- The essential nature of God is Holy Love.
- God's *attributes* describe what it means that God is God. God's *actions*, though, reflect how God chooses to interact with his creation.
- God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, referred to as the Trinity.

Part One: God as Holy Love

"The essential nature of God is holy love."—H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*.

God is *holy*. God's holiness refers to his transcendence. God is altogether different from us. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, and eternal. God is Lord of all.

God is *love*. While God is altogether different from us, he is not distant from us. He has chosen to reveal himself and share relationship with us.

We must always hold both ideas in our hearts and minds. To think of God's holiness without his love leads to despair. To think of God's love without his holiness leads to irreverence.

God's holiness calls us to *reverence*. God's love calls us to *devotion*. We call this dual response of reverence and devotion *worship*. Worship is the proper response to God's self-revelation as *holy love*.

Question: How have you experienced God's holiness? In what ways does God produce a sense of awe and reverence in you?

Question: How have you experienced God's love? In what ways does God produce a sense of devotion, gratitude, and reciprocal love in you?

Part Two: Attributes and Actions

God's *attributes*—the fact that he is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, and eternal—speak to his essential nature and character. God is Lord.

God's *actions* are different. Throughout the ages, God has acted as deliverer, healer, provider, and protector. God chooses to act in these ways to bring about his will in the world. However, God's actions in the world are different from his attributes. God is omnipotent because that's simply a part of what it means for God to be God. However, God acts as healer by choice. God does not always deliver, heal, provide, and protect...at least not in the way we want or ask.

When we treat God's actions as if they are attributes, we put artificial limits on God. God is not some bigger version of Aladdin's Genie. God is not *fixing our world*. He is *redeeming his world*. We don't always understand why God acts sometimes and not others because we can't see what he's planning. There is a mystery to it. God is God and will act as he chooses in order to bring about the redemption of the world.

Question: Have you ever called on God to prove himself to you by doing what you ask? Have you ever prayed words like, “God, if you’re God, then prove it. Heal me...provide for me...deliver me...protect me”?

Question: Around the world, there are Christians who live in bondage, die, go hungry, and get hurt. Is God still God when he doesn’t deliver, heal, provide, or protect?

Question: What does it mean that God isn’t *fixing our world*. He is *redeeming his world*? (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Part Three: God as Trinity

God has revealed himself to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a mystery as well, and one we’re not likely to unravel: We confess and believe God is three-in-one. There are some specific things about the Trinity that we believe and confess:

1. *God has always been three-in-one.* Before Creation, God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. *The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “coinhere.”* This means every action of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is done in unity. There is never a time when any one of them is in conflict or set against the other.
3. That God is three-in-one reveals to us that *God is a God of relationship*. It is out of the abundance of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that all things exist, and we are invited to dwell in the midst of that perfect love.

Question: Is it easy or difficult for you to accept that there is “mystery” surrounding God? Would you rather have a God you could understand completely?*

***Reductionism**—*Reductionism is when we take what we can understand about God and say that is all there is to God. Because God is transcendent, there will always be things we can’t understand (John 16:12; Isaiah 55:8-9). We must resist the temptation to bring God down to our level.*

Session Three: In the Beginning, God Created

Key Objectives:

- That God created the Heavens and the Earth is the foundation of all we believe.
- As humans created in the image of God, we were made to live in a God-given, God-sustained relationship with God, with each other, with all Creation, and with ourselves.
- God's intent for his good Creation is *Shalom* ("peace")—nothing missing, nothing broken.

Part One: God Acts

"The idea that God is the Creator of all things is the indispensable foundation on which all the other beliefs of the Christian faith are based." —Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*.

The Bible begins with these simple words: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." These words have so many profound meanings we can hardly scratch the surface.

1. **God Acts**—He is not the *unmoved mover who contemplates himself*—he is a personal God who acts with intention. This means Creation itself has both a purpose and a future; it is not a random event unfolding in chaotic patterns shaped by some innate drive to survive.
2. **Creation Ex Nihilo**—We are told God creates "out of nothing." Only God is eternal—in fact, God himself IS life. All living things are made of the stuff of earth and are sustained solely by the life of God—including humans. We are not tiny bits of eternity wrapped in flesh. We are made of dust, and our only hope of eternal life rests in the grace of God.
3. **Creation is Good**—Greek philosophy often gets wrapped up in Christianity when it comes to talking about "the World." God doesn't make junk, and this world isn't a proving ground to see who can make it to heaven. The world and all that is in it is of perfect design. When Paul later writes about "the World," he is referring to systems, beliefs, and practices that deny God as Lord and Creator. We are not broken, fatally flawed creatures that have no choice but to live sinful lives under grace; we are the lost children of God capable of having the image of God restored in us and living holy lives.

Question: Why is the fact that God is Creator so fundamental to our beliefs as Christians?

Question: Must we believe in a literal 7-day creation?*

**Nazarenes are open on this issue. You may believe God created the world in 7 days or 7 million years—but we do believe that God created with intention and design. He didn't just fire up the universe and watch what happened next.*

Part Two: Humans in the Image of God

God created humans “in his image.” To be in the image of God means we have a God-given, God-sustained capacity to partner with God in the world he has made through four key relationships:

1. ***Relationship with God***—Humans have a God-given capacity to experience relationship with God that is unique among all of Creation.
2. ***Relationship with Each Other***—Humans also have a God-given capacity to live in a unique relationship with other humans. We were made to live in community with one another sharing the life and gifts God pours out on his people.
3. ***Relationship with All Creation***—Humans were made to exercise dominion over Creation as God’s representatives on earth. We receive God’s grace, love, and mercy and reflect that grace, love, and mercy to all Creation.
4. ***Relationship with Ourselves***—When we are living in a proper God-given, God-sustained relationship with God, with each other, and with all Creation, we find peace within ourselves. We are *being* what we were made to *be* and *doing* what we were made to *do*.

To live as the image of God in the world requires that we walk in his presence. The image of God is *God-given* and *God-sustained*. Apart from God, all four of these special relationships unravel.

Question: What does it mean to you that you were made in the “image of God”?

Question: To live as the image of God in the world requires that we dwell in God’s presence. He must *give* and *sustain* this good gift. What does it look like to dwell in God’s presence?

Part Three: God’s Intent for Creation

In Genesis, God says that all that he has made is “good,” using the word “*Tov*.” *Tov* is a powerful Hebrew word that packs a much bigger punch than our word “good.” When something is *Tov*, it means it is *being* what it was meant to *be* and *doing* what it was meant to *do*.

In Genesis 1:31, God looks at all that he made and pronounces it *Tov Meod*, or “very good.” What he means is that *everything* is *being* what it was designed to *be* and *doing* what it was designed to *do*. The language he uses evokes a symphony orchestra where each instrument is playing the part written for it and all those individual instruments and parts come together in perfect harmony to make something beautiful.

The word for that kind of beauty is *Shalom*—God’s peace where there is nothing missing and nothing broken. *Shalom* was and is God’s intent for all Creation. He is working to restore *Shalom* to the world.

Question: Where do you see God restoring *Shalom* in the world? Remember, God is not *fixing* our world: He is *redeeming* his world, so look carefully.

Session Four: Sin—Things Fall Apart

Key Objectives:

- There are two aspects of sin: The moral or *forensic* view that says we have broken the law; and the relational or *therapeutic* view that says we have broken the relationship with God by trusting in other things instead of relying on him.
- Both aspects are true, but we believe it is the broken relationship with God that *leads to* breaking the law.
- When we live outside of the life-giving, life-sustaining relationship with God we were designed to have, we break God's laws as we attempt to live on our own.

Part One: The Nature of Sin

"For though they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened."—Romans 1:21

One of the most common words for sin in the Bible is the Greek word *khata*, which means to *miss the mark*. And what mark have we missed? According to Paul, "All have sinned and fallen short of the *glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). The word for "glory" could just as easily be translated as "image," and so sin is ultimately falling short of the image of God—we are not *being* what we were meant to *be*, and so we can't *do* what we were meant to *do*.

There are two explanations for why we have fallen short of God's glory—and they're both true. The first is the *legal* or *forensic* view which says we have fallen short by breaking God's law. The second is the *relational* or *therapeutic* view which says we have fallen short by living outside of the life-giving, life-sustaining relationship with God we were made to have.

We believe the sin of breaking the law *is a result of* the sin of living apart from the relationship with God that gives life. Going to the story of the Fall as told in Genesis (Genesis 3:1-7), Eve sinned the moment she began to believe Satan instead of God. Her absolute trust and faith in God were broken, which opened the way for her to break his law.

This is in keeping with what Paul wrote in Romans 1. We did not honor God or glorify him (trust, obey, and love him), and so our hearts and minds became corrupt.

Question: Which do you find more difficult: keeping God's laws or trusting him in all things?*

Question: What things other than God are you tempted to put your trust in? Do you see trusting other things besides God as sin?

**Every time we break God's laws, it is because we have put our trust in something besides God.*

Part Two: The Result of Sin

To be the image of God is to live within the life-giving, life-sustaining relationship with God we were created to have, which results in a special relationship with each other and with all Creation. When those key relationships are in place, we are at peace within ourselves.

Sin—living apart from that life-giving, life-sustaining relationship with God—destroys all those other relationships, which results in a lack of peace within ourselves. As a result, we break God's laws as we attempt to live in the world without God.

After thousands of years of the bulk of humanity living selfish lives apart from God, we find ourselves in a very human world filled with all sorts of personal and corporate sin built upon the lie that we can live apart from God. Our human world is filled with sin—because we were never meant to live on our own.

Question: What kind of sins do you see every day that are a result of people trying to live without God?

Question: Can you name some of the corporate sins that are a result of trying to create an entire world where we don't need God?*

**As the leader, you may need to "prime the pump" with a few examples like slavery—which still exists by the way.*

Part Three: Universal Sin

We believe all humans are born apart from the life-giving, life-sustaining relationship with God they were designed to have. This does not mean we are born evil, broken, distorted, crippled, or morally bankrupt, although over time, we may become all those things. We're also not born as perfect little angels that are corrupted over time.

To be clear, we are not born *apart* from God. God's prevenient grace is always present and near. But we are born incapable of entering a proper *relationship* with God on our own. We need a Savior. Someone who can break the chains of sin, disordered desires, and self-will and renew us in the image of God by restoring us to the proper relationship with God we were designed for.

His name is Jesus.

Question: John Wesley often said, "Know the disease, know the cure." If the disease of sin is ultimately a result of living apart from a life-giving, life-sustaining relationship with God, what is the cure? Should this view of sin affect how we raise our children and teach them about the nature of sin and salvation?

Session Five: Jesus, the Son of God

Key Objectives:

- God has revealed himself over time culminating in Jesus, the final and greatest revelation of what God is like. This is referred to as *progressive revelation*.
- Jesus's life, death, and resurrection brought together three strains of prophecy that were thought to be separate: The Messiah, The Suffering Servant, and The Son of Man.
- Jesus not only revealed what God is like: He showed us what God's intent for humankind was by being the true image of God in the world.

Part One: Progressive Revelation

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."—Hebrews 1:3

God has revealed himself over time in many ways. Then, in the fullness of time, he revealed himself through Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-2). This is called *progressive revelation*, and it was Plan A, not Plan B. In other words, Jesus has *always* been God's plan to redeem the world. Jesus was not a backup plan in case Israel messed up.

Jesus didn't just come to die for our sins, although that's a really big deal. Jesus came to reveal the heart of God. Everything about Jesus reveals what God is like, not just his death. His birth, the way he lived his life, the things he taught, the miracles he did—all of this was part of his revelation of what God is like.

While Jesus is the complete revelation of what God is like, that doesn't mean God has stopped revealing himself. He continues to reveal himself to us through the Holy Spirit and through his faithful followers—the Church

Question: In what ways is God still revealing himself today?

Question: How we think about God matters...a lot. Is your image of God consistent with what Jesus revealed about God?

Part Two: God Made Flesh

Jesus was, is, and has always been God. He became human when he was born to Mary, but that wasn't his beginning. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always existed in fellowship with one another. How is all that possible? Seriously, nobody knows...it's a mystery.

Jesus became human so that *we could see what God is like* and be saved. As we will discuss in the next lesson, it wasn't just Jesus's death that saved us. Once again, everything about Jesus—his birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension—saved us and saves us.

The things Jesus did during his time on earth brought together three separate strains of prophecy thought by scholars at the time to refer to three different people: The Messiah, The Suffering Servant, and The Son of Man. No one expected the “Messiah” and “Son of Man” to provide for the salvation of the world as the “Suffering Servant.”

Which is why we needed Jesus to show us what God is like. We look for armies, war, victory through power. God offers a manger, a cross, and an empty tomb. God’s not like us. His ways are not our ways.

Question: When you look at the birth, life, teaching, and miracles of Jesus, what do they reveal to you about what God is like?

Question: Do you ever have difficulty reconciling what you believe about God the Father with God as revealed by Jesus?*

**Whenever God doesn’t seem like Jesus—we’re missing something. (Luke 6:35-36, John 10:27-30, John 14:8-11)*

Part Three: Jesus as Human

Jesus not only came to show us what God is like, but he also came to show us what it means to be fully human—human the way God intended humans to be. In other words, he walked among us as the image of God in the world.

In all that Jesus said and did, he was communicating two things: This is what God is like, and this is what humans are supposed to be like.

Jesus showed us what it is like to trust and obey the Father all the way to death and back. He modeled for us what faith in God truly means. To have faith in God is to trust and obey him completely with nothing held back.

Question: What are some ways Jesus demonstrated that he “trusted” the Father and “obeyed” the Father completely?

Question: In what areas of your life is it most difficult to trust and obey the Father?

Question: Jesus lived in constant communion with the Father. What are some practices of Jesus that we might be able to adopt to help us abide in God’s presence?

Session Six: Jesus, Our Savior

Key Objectives:

- The saving work of Jesus is best understood through his threefold role as Prophet, Priest, and King.
- As *Prophet*, Jesus showed us what God is like and what it is God wants.
- As *Priest*, Jesus served as the perfect mediator between God and humans.
- As *King*, Jesus reigns as Lord and calls us to follow him.

Part One: Know the Disease, Know the Cure

“When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.”—Isaac Watts, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

John Wesley often said, “Know the disease, know the cure.” To understand salvation, we must understand the nature of sin. Now, in week four, we said sin was essentially living outside of the life-giving relationship of love and trust in God we were created to live in. Much like a flashlight without batteries, we cannot *be* what we were made to *be* without the *presence of God* dwelling in us.

Living in the world apart from the presence of God leads us to break God’s laws because we were never meant to live on our own.

So, to be saved from our life of sin, we need several things.*

1. **We need to know we have sinned and desire to be reconciled to God. (As Prophet—** Jesus reveals both what God is like and what it means to be human. The revelation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reveals our sin and draws us to the saving presence of God.)
2. **We need forgiveness, cleansing, healing, and a fresh start. (As Priest—** Jesus served as the perfect mediator between God and humankind and through his sacrifice offered forgiveness, healing, cleansing, and the making of a new covenant.)
3. **We need ongoing power and guidance to help us live holy lives as the children of God. (As King—** Jesus ascended to Heaven and gave the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the spiritual gifts so that we can be filled with his presence and live holy lives.)

**I know this needs a scripture reference, so Hebrews...the whole thing. Seriously, there’s no way to “proof text” this with a few handy verses.*

Question: Does defining “sin” as “living outside of the life-giving relationship of love and trust in God we were created to live in” change your view of what salvation means? In what way?

Question: Which of the roles Jesus fulfills in our salvation speaks to you most: Prophet, Priest, or King?

Part Two: It Is Finished?

In his three-fold role as Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus provides everything we need to be saved...but it certainly doesn't seem everyone is saved. The world is full of sin. There are three potential reasons for this:

1. Jesus has saved everyone including those who continue to live sinful lives (Universal Salvation).
2. Jesus only died for an elect group of people, not everyone (Limited Atonement).
3. Jesus offers salvation to all, but there remains something for us to do (Unlimited Atonement).

Question: As Wesleyan/Holiness people, we believe in unlimited atonement, but why? Why wouldn't God just save everyone and set the world right?*

**Emphasize the fact that God wants "children," not "slaves." By offering salvation to us as opposed to imposing salvation on us, God preserves the "relationship" he desires with us. To impose salvation on us is to take away the option for us to willingly come to him to be saved. See Galatians 4:1-7.*

This week, we've looked at salvation through the lens of the work of Jesus. Next week, we'll look at salvation through the lens of sinners and saints. If you want to prepare, read Romans...yep, all of it. Or Chapter 7 of the book, which is much shorter but not as good.

Session Seven: The Holy Spirit and Salvation

Key Objectives:

- Salvation is *free in all* and *free for all*. But we are called to respond. As Randy Maddox says, we are *response-able*.
- We need more than forgiveness: We need to be reconciled to God, and reconciliation requires participation.
- Through the Holy Spirit we come to know there is a God. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and our need for forgiveness and healing. The Holy Spirit fills us, drives out sin, and restores the image of God in us—we are born again.

Part One: Free *in all*, Free *for all*

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.” —John 15:26

We believe God has provided salvation that is *free in all*—it is a free gift of God and not a result of any work on our part—and *free for all*—all who believe may come.

Like the Prodigal Son, though, we must “come to ourselves,” leave our life of sin, and come home. Fortunately, we don’t have to do this on our own either because God has given us the Holy Spirit.

Read Luke 15:11-24

Question: Have you ever had a moment when, like the Prodigal, you had to “come to yourself”? What caused you to realize you’d wandered away?

Part Two: The Advocate

Read John 16:7-15

- The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and of the fact that we must be forgiven and healed.
- The Holy Spirit guides us into the presence of God where we are reconciled, healed, and restored.
- The Holy Spirit fills us, drives out sin, and restores the image of God in us—we are born again.

In every single step towards holiness, God acts and we respond. As Randy Maddox says, we are made “response-able” to the work of God. The fact that we are able to respond to God is due to the gift of the Holy Spirit and prevenient grace.

Question: The Holy Spirit convicts, guides, and empowers. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your life?*

**While we won't be addressing the "means of grace" until next week, try to steer this conversation towards things like prayer, Scripture, worship (including the sacraments), and time with other believers. While we may "feel" the Holy Spirit, what we "feel/experience" must align with these other more reliable means of grace.*

Part Three: The Grace of God

We call God's action in the world "grace," and while there's really only one kind of grace, we often speak of grace in different ways.

1. ***Prevenient Grace***—This is the grace that goes before us both to make us aware of God and capable of responding to him.
2. ***Saving Grace***—This is the grace that helps us "come to ourselves." We realize who God is, who we are, and our need for forgiveness, healing, and a new start. Saving grace also cleanses, heals, and restores us to the right relationship with God.
3. ***Sanctifying Grace***—This is the grace that gradually pulls us deeper and deeper towards God and makes us holy.

God's grace, working through the Holy Spirit, is what makes us capable of responding to God's call to be reconciled to him. It works through what are called the "means of grace," which we will be discussing next week.

Question: How has God used the people of God to "mediate" his grace to you?

Question: Has God ever used you to "mediate" his grace to others?

Session Eight: The Holy Spirit, The Church, and the Means of Grace

Key Objectives:

- When God calls us to be saved, he also calls us to become part of his church. Christianity requires community—there are no solitary Christians.
- The Holy Spirit works in and through the church using what are called the “means of grace,” which include Scripture, preaching, prayer, the Sacraments, and the communion of saints.
- We are God’s ambassadors in the world as he works through us to redeem the world.

Part One: Called to Each Other

“Christianity is essentially a social religion; and to turn it into a solitary one is indeed to destroy it.” —John Wesley

When God calls us to himself, he also calls us to become part of his people, the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-14).

The church as a human institution has had some rough moments but we must never mistake what people have done through the ages in the “name of God” with “God’s own action” here on earth. God’s church—the Spirit-filled, redeemed family of God—is pure, spotless, blameless, holy.

Question: 64% of young people between the age of 18-30 have left “the church,” even though many of them continue to say they believe in God. Why do so many of our young people dislike the church? While it’s easy to come up with bad reasons (emotivism, humanism, individualism), are there legitimate reasons why they don’t want to be part of the church?

Part Two: The Means of Grace

God has chosen to do his great work of redeeming his world through the church. He does this by working in us as well as through us using what are called the “means of grace.”

The means of grace include Scripture, preaching, prayer, the Sacraments, and the communion of saints (fellowship of believers). When you bring together all the means of grace in one moment—it’s called worship. The means of grace are how the Holy Spirit does all those things we talked about last week, including convict, guide, and empower us.

It is critical to understand that God works *in us* so that he can work *through us*. At no point are we to run off and try to “do the work of God” on our own. God acts—we respond. And he acts through the means of grace.

Question: Which of the means of grace do you feel the Holy Spirit uses most often in convicting, guiding, or empowering you?

Question: How has the Holy Spirit used the means of grace to work through you?*

**Some will find the concept of the means of grace a bit limiting. I know I did at first. But if you have a broad enough view of how the Holy Spirit uses Scripture, preaching, prayer, and the people of God to shape us and lead us, there's no work of God in the world that doesn't flow through these means, with the possible exception of natural or general revelation.*

Part Three: The Work of the Church

God works *in* the church so he can work *through* the church. Traditionally, there are five activities that make up the overall work of the church.

1. **Worship**—God calls us into his presence, changes us, and sends us.
2. **Fellowship**—We draw closer to one another as God draws us closer to himself.
3. **Discipleship**—We help one another grow in knowledge, wisdom, and experience.
4. **Ministry**—We serve each other and our communities with emphasis on the overlooked.
5. **Missions/Evangelism**—We serve as God's ambassadors in the world as God makes his appeal through us, "Be reconciled to God!"

Through Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, and Missions, we exercise the means of grace as God works in us and through us to redeem his world.

Question: Few churches are able to be balanced in their approach to the five activities of the church. Where is your church strong? Where could your church be stronger?

Question: Where is your church's "comfort zone" and why? What would it take to become a more balanced church?

Session Nine: Sanctification

Key Objectives:

- Only God is holy, and any holiness we may aspire to is found only in God's presence. We are bearers or vessels of God's holiness.
- Sanctification doesn't happen all at once; it is a process of surrendering one's nature bit-by-bit for the nature of God as we dwell in his presence through a process Wesley called Spiritual Respiration.
- Entire sanctification is to live with a constant "yes" in one's heart to the will of God. No more resistance, no more hesitation. It is "perfect submission." It is being "filled with his goodness, lost in his love." Like our salvation, it is a gift of God and not a work we do.

Part One: Called to Be Holy

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.."—1

Thessalonians 5:23-24

We don't use the word "holy" very much these days. We're afraid people will think we believe we're better than them. But holiness doesn't mean *we* are *good*. It means we've surrendered to a good God. Only God is holy. Any holiness we claim on our part is derived solely from his presence in our lives. Holiness only exists in the presence of God.

In the Bible, holiness has always referred to God's presence, but in the Old Testament, God's holiness was always external—a sort of overlay. Now, though, because of the great work of Jesus, we may have God's presence inside of us (John 14:23)!

Question: When you hear the word "holiness," does your mind go to getting rid of sin or being filled with God? What if being filled with God is how you get rid of sin?

Part Two: Abiding in Jesus

Read John 15:4-11. Holiness is not the absence of sin: It is the fullness of Jesus. As we abide in the presence of Jesus, we are made holy.

3 Critical Steps

1. We must learn to practice the presence of God at all times by immersing ourselves in the Means of Grace (Scripture, preaching, prayer, fellowship, worship).
2. We must fill our lives with good things (Philippians 4:8).
3. We must rid our lives of things that "grieve the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 4:17-32).

Question: What are ways you can practice the presence of God throughout the day?

Question: How do we fill our lives with good things? What sorts of things fit this list?

Question: What are the things in our lives that grieve the Holy Spirit?

Question: Sanctification is not an individual quest for personal perfection—it is a journey we take together as the people of God. How can we help and encourage one another on this journey towards holiness?

Part Three: Entire Sanctification

There may come a time in the life of the mature believer when all resistance to God ends. Jesus Christ is Lord and Master and reigns completely. This is a gift of God that is the result of living in his presence over time. It is best summed up in the classic hymn, “Blessed Assurance.”

Perfect submission, all is at rest.

I in my Savior am happy and blessed.

Watching and waiting, looking above,

Filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

Sanctification, which Wesley referred to as *Christian Perfection*, doesn’t mean *you* are *perfect*. You’ll have bad days, make mistakes, experience selfish moments. But your will is no longer opposed to God’s perfect will. When the Holy Spirit gives the gentle correction that says, “Hey, you’re being a bit selfish, aren’t you?” or “Is that really who you want to be?” the immediate response is surrender and loving obedience. There’s no argument, denial, or self-defense.

Many of us may have heard at some point that the path to entire sanctification involves getting sin out of our lives until there’s simply no sin left. This is a bit backwards. We don’t get sin out of our lives so that God can fill us—God fills us so there’s no room left for sin. Whatever we focus on grows. If we focus on sin, it only grows. If we focus on the presence of God, well, that grows too.

To be entirely sanctified is to be at rest in the presence of God who fills us and drives out all desire to do anything contrary to his will.

Question: For those of us who are older, it seems we don’t hear about holiness or sanctification as much as when we were younger. Why do you think we’ve stopped talking about this?

Question: If entire sanctification means to live at rest in the presence of God, does that sound a little more like something we could aspire to as opposed to living entirely without sin?

Session Ten: Heaven

Key Objectives:

- All theology is shaped by the belief that time is headed somewhere and that our world has a destiny. Good theology is always eschatological. We live with our faces turned towards heaven.
- Specific theories about what will happen at the end of time fall under the category of “speculative theology,” meaning they are theories. We cannot know for certain. As Nazarenes, we can be pre-millennial, post-millennial, amillennial, or pan-millennial (“it will all pan out”—my favorite).
- We believe in the resurrection of the body and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. Whatever our future holds, it will be in a physical place with physical bodies, and there will be perfect peace—*Shalom*.
- The purpose of all the end-time prophecies is to give us *hope*, not *certainty*. Eschatology is always a bit mysterious. We are to be a people of hope.

Part One: Living With Hope

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”—Revelation 21:1

Time has a future. We do not believe the universe will just sort of run out of energy and die. God created all things with purpose and intent. And what is that purpose and intent? *Shalom*—perfect peace where nothing is missing and nothing is broken.

All good theology is eschatological, which simply means it points towards Heaven as the goal of all God’s activity on earth. We live with the hope of heaven.

Living with the hope of heaven is hard because, speculation aside, we have no idea what to expect. To live this way requires absolute trust in the God who has made us, saved us, and promised us he will be with us for all eternity.

Question: How often do you think of heaven? When you think of the future, how long is your time horizon? Does it stop at retirement? Does it stop at death? Can you imagine past your death into God’s future?

Question: The promise of heaven is what breaks the power of death over us. Is that true in your life? Are you bound by the fear of death, or has the promise of heaven set you free? Resurrection people should be powerful people because they have a hope that cannot be shaken.

Part Two: What Happens Next?

While much of what we guess about what happens when we die and the end of time is speculative, there are a few things that are clear.

- Things get worse before they get better. All the prophecies point to a great falling away from the true faith as we near the end of time.
- When Jesus returns, the dead will be raised (resurrected). Whatever the future holds, we will have real bodies.
- Those who are “in Christ” will be raised to live forever with him.
- Those who have rejected the saving presence of God will “perish,” experience a “second death, burn in Hell forever, get thrown into a lake of fire—pick one, two, or all of them. It’s not as clear as some people think. Hey, it’s bad. The key is, God doesn’t do it *to them*. It’s simply what happens to those who are outside of his saving presence.
- There will be a new heaven and a new earth, and God will make his dwelling place in our midst. Whatever the future holds, we will be in a real place with God forever (Eden remade? I hope so!).
- There will be perfect peace—*Shalom*—nothing missing, nothing broken.

Question: Do you ever imagine what heaven might be like? (Read Revelation 21:1-5)

Question: In reading the Revelation passage, what aspect of the future that lies before us sparks hope in you?

Question: Are we guilty at times of being, as C.S. Lewis claims, too easily pleased with the stuff of earth to think much about heaven?

Question: What can we do to keep the hope of heaven before us?

Close with this reading:

How should we live our lives as we anticipate the life to come? We abide in the presence of Jesus, breathing in his grace, breathing out his grace, surrendering our life, or will, to the life and will of our good and gracious God.

As God’s grace allows, we live at peace with God, with one another, with all Creation, and within ourselves. And occasionally, for just a moment, we get a glimpse of Heaven, and we long for more.

Until that day when faith becomes sight, and we enter fully into the presence of God, and we dwell with him forever and experience his *Shalom*—nothing missing, nothing broken.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come. Maranatha!