

LEADER GUIDE

Session 1: How United Methodists Interpret Scripture

HOST CODE: 246810

TO THE LEADER

Faithful and Inclusive: The Bible, Sexuality, and the United Methodist Church is a five-session study that explores how United Methodists can be completely faithful to the authority of Scripture and fully inclusive of LGBTQ people.

Offering a Wesleyan approach to the interpretation of scripture, it allows ample time for thoughtful small-group discussion. The seven biblical passages most commonly cited on this topic are studied from a comprehensive perspective of content, context, and culture.

Rev. Rob Fuquay is the author-video presenter of the study; Fuquay is the author of several published biblical studies and the senior pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. The videos also feature ten LGBTQ laypersons and parents of LGBTQ children who share their faith stories.

Leader Responsibilities

- + Pray daily for your group participants.
- + Complete the daily assignment along with your participants.
- + Participate in the Group Discussion Question on the app.
- + Participate in the prayer request board and the message board on the app.
- + Monitor all posts on the app and delete any you feel are inappropriate.

Leader Preparation for Group Meeting

- + Read the Overview for Leader content for the chapter. Chapter goals, a chapter summary, and biblical background are included.
- + Familiarize yourself with the chapter's leader guide to be confident with the content and flow. Fill in the time each section should start based on your chosen session duration and write your summary of the group discussion question in the space provided.

Using the Leader Guide

- + Each leader guide is written to be flexible to fit a 60-minute or 90-minute small group session.
- + For a 60-minute session, SKIP all questions highlighted in blue.
 - If you have 90 minutes, use the additional information and questions highlighted in blue.
 - The time frames in parentheses (for example, 15 or 30 MINUTES TOTAL) mean that the first number is for a 60-minute session; the second number is for a 90-minute session. (Note: the participants will have answered all the questions whether or not you have time to discuss them. They will have access to all their answers in their Meeting Guide.)
- + To plan for your session, write the exact time of day you need to be at each new segment of the session. It is vital that you begin and end your session on the timeframe committed to by your group. This part of your preparation sets you up to stay on schedule.
- + Space is left for your summary of responses to the assignment's group discussion question. Return to the group discussion question before the meeting, read the responses, and summarize.

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LEADER NOTES

Note: Be sure you have read the content above and prepared your leader guide as directed.

_____ WELCOME, OPENING PRAYER AND GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION (5 MINUTES)

Offer a personal welcome.

Take attendance as persons join the meeting.

Ask how the group did completing the Daily Assignment and ask if anyone needs clarification on how to use the app. (If a participant needs more than a quick answer, arrange to talk after the meeting.)

Double check that each person has completed their profile on the app by filling in their contact information and turning on their notifications.

Ask participants to open their app to this session's Meeting Guide. (Make sure all have found and opened their Meeting Guides before continuing.)

Opening Prayer

Thank you for using the Prayer Request section of the app this week. Please continue to do so throughout this Study. *(Feel free to comment on any prayer requests or celebrations you read on the app).*

Let us pray.

Lord, we know that we are all your children, and you love us equally. We all need guidance and direction. We begin this experience open to new learning. Send your Holy Spirit to convict us, convert us, and conform us until we are wholly yours.

In Christ's name, Amen.

Group Discussion Question

As we began this study together, we were given a Group Discussion Question in our Daily Assignment to stir our thoughts.

The question was: What does it mean to you to give the Bible authority in your life?

Briefly summarize what was shared by participants in the Group Discussion. There is no need to explain more here. This is just to get people thinking.

Summary of discussion thread:

_____ EXPLORING "HOW UNITED METHODISTS INTERPRET SCRIPTURE" (25 or 35 MINUTES TOTAL)

Goal of this Session

Share the following:

The goal of this session is that we will learn how United Methodists interpret Scripture, learn about the Wesleyan “quadrilateral,” and the difference between “prescriptive” and “descriptive” scripture. We will also explore the concept of “progressive revelation.”

Let’s get started.

Do No Harm (5 MINUTES)

We were reminded in the Assignment on Day 1 to have tolerance and respect for each other, to practice good listening, and to be careful about the words we use. Let’s remember to respond in grace when we disagree or question something said by another person. There are probably some of you in this group who have been hurt and wounded by the church. Let’s make our first priority to make sure we all feel safe. When we do that, we will have accomplished one of John Wesley’s three simple rules. “DO NO HARM”.

How do you think our church can navigate through this difficult season without doing more harm? (Take 2-3 answers.)

How would you explain the quote from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism for people today? Wesley said: “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these small differences.”

What do you think this quote from John Wesley means? (Take 2-3 answers.)

Interpreting Scripture (5 MINUTES)

The goal of this first session is learn how the Bible is interpreted by United Methodists.

You might have a literal way of reading the Bible: “The Bible says it, so I believe it.” You may be somebody who says, “I take the Bible seriously, but not literally.” Or, you may not hold the Bible as a source of authority at all. As far as you’re concerned, the Bible is no different than a history book or a fiction novel. Maybe you find some moral teaching in it, but you don’t look to the Bible as a source of spiritual truth.

You were asked to consider this question and post your answers on a Group Discussion board, so your answers are not in your Meeting Guide. Let’s each briefly share our current thoughts on the following question:

How do you read the Bible--literally, with authority; serious with authority, but not literal; or, non-authoritatively, like a history book? Remember, there is no wrong answer. We just need to be honest with ourselves, and respectful of what others share. *(Take several answers.)*

The Wesley Quadrilateral (10 MINUTES)

In our study this week, we learned about what the United Methodist Church doctrine says about biblical interpretation.

On Scripture, our United Methodist doctrine affirms three things. You'll find this in the **Large-Group Discussion segment** of your Meeting Guide.

1. All things necessary for salvation are contained in the Bible.
2. Nothing beyond Scripture as it pertains to salvation is required of any person.
3. We recognize the 66 books of the Bible.

So, there is nothing in our United Methodist doctrine about believing we are to read the Bible literally or, as some say, as the inerrant Word of God.

And while John Wesley believed that Scripture is our supreme authority for salvation, he also said we must consider tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture is above all, but our understanding of Scripture is aided by the historic teachings and traditions of the church. Our reason and intellectual capacity for understanding, and our own personal experience.

This idea is referred to as The Wesley Quadrilateral. You'll also find this in the **Large-Group Discussion segment** of your Meeting Guide. In other words, our understanding of our Christian beliefs is based on:

1. Scripture: It is our supreme authority for salvation. Scripture is above all.
2. Tradition: We look back through the centuries at the historic teachings of the faith in many nations and cultures. What can we learn to help us understand?
3. Reason: We apply clear, logical thought and intellect to the understanding of the faith.
4. Experience: We apply our own personal experience of faith to shape our understanding.

Can anyone think of a specific example of how you apply this way of thinking to a certain aspect of your faith and biblical understanding? You'll find your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion segment** of your Meeting Guide. *(Hear from 1-2 persons, or if no one volunteers, give one example such as: we do not follow the food laws in the Old Testament.)*

Additional Quotes from The United Methodist Book of Discipline (10 MINUTES)

Let's look at a few more quotes from The United Methodist Book of Discipline that emphasize the importance of Wesley's Quadrilateral. You'll find these in the **Large-Group Discussion segment** of your Meeting Guide.

We need four volunteers to read one passage each. *(Select 4 readers.)*

“The Christian witness, even when grounded in Scripture and mediated by tradition, is ineffectual unless understood and appropriated by the individual. To become our witness, it must make sense in terms of our own reason and experience.” (p.77)

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“We interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible as a whole...as we work with each text, we take into account what we have been able to learn about the original context and intention of that text.” (Paragraph 105. Section 4- Our Theological Task. Under “Theological Guidelines, Sources and Criteria. Page 84.)

“In the name of Jesus Christ, we are called to work within our diversity while exercising patience and forbearance with one another. Such patience stems neither from indifference toward truth nor from an indulgent tolerance of error but from an awareness that we know only in part and that none of us is able to search the mysteries of God except by the Spirit of God. We proceed with our theological task, trusting that the Spirit will grant us wisdom to continue our journey with the whole people of God.” (Paragraph 105. Section 4- Our Theological Task. Under “Theological Guidelines, Sources and Criteria.” Subheading: The Present Challenge to Theology in the Church. Page 89.)

Hopefully you can see that when you are NOT talking about salvation, The United Methodist Church gives room for differences of opinion on understanding scripture.

Paul, Timothy and The Inspired Word of God (5 MINUTES)

Share the following:

II Timothy 3:16 says, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness ...” (NRSV)

Rob Fuquay talked about what the Apostle Paul is referring to when he talks about Scripture. We also learned that Inspired means “God-breathed” in Greek and that the word ‘inspired’ is not used anywhere else in the New Testament.

Some say inspired means God dictated. Others say God breathed is like God breathing into Adam to give him life. This interpretation means God breathes upon human-written material to give spiritual life -- inspiration.

That's different from saying God wrote every word with the intent that every part of the Bible describes God's will for us.

What do you think Paul meant in saying, “All scripture is inspired by God...?” You’ll find your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion segment** of your Meeting Guide. (*Hear from 2-3 persons.*)

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (10 or 20 MINUTES)

I am now going to practice placing you in small groups. In addition to giving you an opportunity to see what you will experience each meeting, this gives me a chance to practice setting up these breakout rooms in Zoom.

*Divide the class into **random breakout rooms of 3-4 participants** and set the countdown clock for **10 or 20 minutes**. Tell participants to choose a small-group leader who will keep the discussion moving.*

Tell participants to use the Small-Group Discussion segment of their Meeting Guide for content, questions, and answers they saved during their Daily Assignments.

*Ask the groups to spend the next **10 or 20 minutes** on this activity. (The leader should participate in one of the small-group discussions. There is no need to have small groups report their discussions to the whole group.)*

Note: The content of the Small-Group Discussion guide is included at the end of this document.

BREAKOUT ROOM GUIDE

| | | | | |
|---|----|-------|------|-----|
| Participants (<u>excluding</u> leader and co-leader) | 15 | 12-14 | 9-11 | 6-8 |
| Breakout rooms needed | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |

DISCUSSION IN PAIRS (5 or 10 MINUTES)

*Divide the class into **random breakout rooms of 2 participants** and set the countdown clock for **10 or 15 minutes**. Tell participants to use the **Pairs Discussion segment of their Meeting Guide** for answers they saved during their Daily Assignments.*

Note: The content of the Pairs Discussion guide is below.

Having heard Matt Bays’ testimony, what new insight have you gained? How do you feel about what he had to say? What questions come to mind?

CLOSING PRAYER (10 MINUTES)

Share the following:

As we prepare to close in prayer, know that we have a private Prayer Request board we can use at any time to share joys, sorrows, or personal needs. We will all want to read the requests and pray

for them daily. You will also want to look at your group roster and pray for each person in our group.

Now please navigate to the **Meeting Closing segment** of your Meeting Guide. Here you will find your Personal prayer and answers to other questions you will have written as part of your preparation for our time together.

If you were able to do the Orientation assignment before this meeting, you can find what you wrote in the Meeting Closing segment of your Meeting Guide. If you did not yet write your prayer, you may write it now in the Meeting Guide. The prompt for this prayer was asking God for guidance and inspiration as you join this group ad this study.

Please take the next minute to review and update your Personal Prayer. In a moment, I'm going to ask each of you to share your prayer as we close our meeting. Also, you can access your Personal Prayer each day you complete an assignment.

Give participants a minute to type.

For today's closing prayer, I will call on each of you to read your Personal Prayer, and then I will close us in prayer.

Please join me in prayer.

(Call on each participant.)

(Close with your Personal Prayer.)

Lord, we bring to you these Personal Prayers as well as the following needs.

(Ask participants to speak up to add their prayers.)

We bring you these and all our unspoken prayer requests in Christ's name. Amen.

<End>

LEADER NOTES

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask one person to be a timekeeper and to lead the group by reading the instructions and questions aloud. Make sure you go quickly through the six scripture passages and the reading the paragraph about “progressive revelation” so you will have time to discuss the two questions at the end.

You will be transferred back into the main group when the breakout timer runs out.

Prescriptive and Descriptive Passages of Scripture

One helpful criterion to understanding the Bible is to understand the difference between Prescriptive and Descriptive passages.

Some scriptures are “prescriptive,” meaning they should **apply to all time**.

Others are more “descriptive,” describing how people understood God’s will **in the time period the passage was written**.

Everyone read, one at a time, the following five passages of scripture **silently**. After everyone has read the first one, everyone answer the question: Is this Prescriptive or descriptive? Continue with the next four passages. See if all agree. Go Quickly!

Deuteronomy 13:6-10 (NRSV)

“If anyone secretly entices you—even if it is your brother, your father’s son or your mother’s son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend—saying, “Let us go worship other gods,” whom neither you nor your ancestors have known, any of the gods of the peoples that are around you, whether near you or far away from you, from one end of the earth to the other, you must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people. Stone them to death for trying to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Leviticus 19:18 (NRSV)

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NRSV)

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

I Corinthians 14:34 Version (NRSV)

“Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.

Romans 12:18 (NRSV)

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Have one person read the following aloud to your small group:

Doing this exercise means you're using some kind of measurement by which to interpret Scripture. Especially if you didn't answer the same each time.

This leads us to an important doctrine known as **Progressive Revelation**.

Progressive Revelation assumes that **God is not finished communicating with us**.

+ Individual passages of Scripture must be interpreted within the whole of Scripture and specifically the character of Jesus, in whom God's character has been most fully revealed.

+ We understand Scripture best when interpreted by the spirit and character of Jesus. We'll come back to this thought in Session 5 when we consider the Jesus Ethic for reading the Bible.

permanent, but understanding **God's will may live beyond the specific standards of the cultures when the Bible was written and read**.

This doesn't settle the issue of why or how we should interpret the Bible when it comes to human sexuality, but for now, let's just land on these questions:

Discuss Briefly:

If you didn't answer the same way for all of the five previous verses, why is that?

What has gone into forming whether you believe a passage is prescriptive or descriptive?