

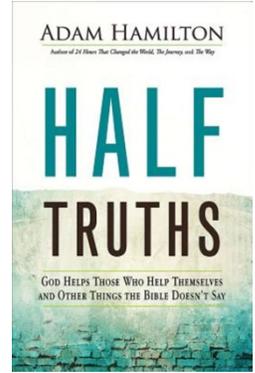
# Worship Brainstorming Summary

## “Half Truths”

August 8, 2022

September 4-October 2, 2022 (5 Sundays)

**Members present:** Vicki Zuker, Ron Zuker, Pastor Mary, Betty Kinney, Jean Kelly, Marie Kordecki, Karen Post, Jim Post, Carole Koch, Dave Booth, Sue Baranowski, Ed Baranowski, Rose Emmons, Barb Gripton, Karen Booth



**Social Justice Issue for September 2022:** Voting Rights

**Social Justice Issue for October 2022:** Gun Violence

**2022 theme connection:** Part of our spiritual journey is recognizing that we believe some things that are not Biblically accurate or helpful. Too often we share these “half-truths” as Gospel truth, which can hurt others and compromise our witness. How can we “flip the script” on some long-held (and unhelpful) sayings? How can we trust Jesus and not lean on clichés? How can we better learn to offer grace and love - not platitudes?

**Synopsis:** We’ve heard certain phrases all of our lives, but in Adam Hamilton’s book, Half Truths: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves and Other Things the Bible Doesn’t Say, we learn that although they capture some element of truth, when compared to the wisdom found in Scripture, they’re really just popular sayings. What is the truth? How can we discover truth through context and close reading? What does that tell us about the nature of God? What happens when we view the world through the lens of Jesus?

### Resources:

- [amplifymedia.com/amplify/series/unitedmethodistpublishinghouse/14418-half-truths](https://amplifymedia.com/amplify/series/unitedmethodistpublishinghouse/14418-half-truths)
- Half Truths promo: [youtube.com/watch?v=q44KNpgbh8I&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q44KNpgbh8I&t=1s) Length: 1:02. Cost: Free. Web license: Not sure.
- Preview video: [youtube.com/watch?v=QAEL5z38Exw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAEL5z38Exw) Length: 1:00. Cost: Free. Web license: Not sure.
- *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I’ve Loved* by Kate Bowler. Related TED Talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTcJmlbn5nw>
- *The Will of God* by Leslie Weatherhead.
  - Chapters:
    - God’s Intentional Will
    - God’s Circumstantial Will
    - God’s Ultimate Will
    - Discerning the Will of God
    - In His Will Is our Peace
  - Synopsis:

During the tumultuous era of World War II, the city of London shattered under unrelenting bombs dropped by Nazi Germany. Millions of buildings were destroyed or damaged, tens of thousands of civilians were killed, and survivors were left to ask: How can this destruction be part of God’s plan? What is God’s will in all of this?

After City Temple in London was reduced to rubble, Rev. Leslie Weatherhead crafted five sermons on understanding the will of God to help his congregation endure religious doubt as their city—and church—crumbled around them. Weatherhead’s sermons were eventually published as *The Will of God*, a resource that has sold more than a million copies and has been a lifeline for grieving persons seeking to understand God’s purpose for their pain. This revised edition of the classic book includes background information and photos of the historical setting that inspired this book, and a new cover and layout to refresh a timeless message—both for new readers and returning fans.

- <https://openthebible.org/article/five-cliches-you-wont-find-in-the-bible/>
- <https://www.orbcfamily.org/blog/faith/7-christian-cliches-that-help-no-one/>
- <https://www.premierchristianity.com/i-dont-like-your-platitude-the-case-against-christian-cliches/3902.article>
- <https://faitheanne.medium.com/6-reasons-to-throw-out-the-platitudes-eaf2cbb082a5>
- <https://religionnews.com/2016/03/21/3-untrue-christian-cliches/>
- A 4-part series by Christian Piatt
  - [patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/ten-cliches-christians-should-never-use/](http://patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/ten-cliches-christians-should-never-use/)
  - [patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/ten-more-cliches-christians-should-avoid/](http://patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/ten-more-cliches-christians-should-avoid/)
  - [patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/nine-final-christian-cliches-to-avoid/](http://patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/nine-final-christian-cliches-to-avoid/)
  - [patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/ten-antidotes-to-christian-cliches/](http://patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/2012/07/ten-antidotes-to-christian-cliches/)

**Related ideas:**

- November 2019 series based on *Why? Making Sense of God’s Will* by Adam Hamilton
  - [lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-3-2019-message-god-and-suffering/](http://lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-3-2019-message-god-and-suffering/)
  - [lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-10-2019-message-unanswered-prayers/](http://lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-10-2019-message-unanswered-prayers/)
  - [lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-17-2019-message-gods-will-for-your-life/](http://lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-17-2019-message-gods-will-for-your-life/)
  - [lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-24-2019-message-love-wins/](http://lakeharborumc.org/2019/11/november-24-2019-message-love-wins/)
- Close reading of Scripture gives us more questions than answers.
- We want to make sense of why things happen, but sometimes our most faithful response is “I don’t know.”
- **Wesleyan quadrilateral** as a basis for Biblical interpretation: *Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience*. Graphic versions are available at [lakeharborumc.org/2022/08/august-8-2022-worship-brainstorming/nggallery/page/2](http://lakeharborumc.org/2022/08/august-8-2022-worship-brainstorming/nggallery/page/2).
- Use **Wesley’s Covenant Prayer**

**Activity:** Open worship with a short vignette or reflection on when we heard the half-truth of the day and how it impacted us.

**Music:**

*God Weeps* (FWS 2048)

*It Is Well with My Soul* (UMH 377)

*Be Still, My Soul* (UMH 534)

*Through It All* (UMH 507)

*Abide with Me* (UMH 700)

*Were You There?* (UMH 288)

*Goodness Is Stronger than Evil* (FWS 2219)

*What a Friend We Have in Jesus* (UMH 526)

*This Is My Father’s World* (UMH 144)

*Precious Lord, Take My Hand* (UMH 474)

*Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire* (UMH 492)  
*When We Are Called to Sing Your Praise* (FWS  
2216)

*In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful* (FWS 2195)  
*Worn by Tenth Avenue North*

*Thy Will Be Done* by Hillary Scott

**Visuals:**

- Use **emojis** as they're designed to be quick expressions (smiley face, praying hands, ill (green) face, heart), but they can only do so much. This may relate to our use of platitudes and clichés because it's no one's intentions to cause harm, but these phrases often do.
- Big chair, cut in half (goes with the preview videos and demonstrates that we need a solid foundation for our faith)
- The words HALF TRUTH, cutting off the top or bottom half of each word.

**Discussion points:** 1) GriefShare participants have voiced how unhelpful it is to hear so many of the phrases that we'll be looking at as they grieved the loss of loved ones. Most people don't mean to be jerks. We need to choose words carefully – what, how, when, and to whom we say them so we aren't jerks and offer real comfort. Like Job's friends, some of our best comforting happens when we are just present and don't utter a word. 2) Pastor Mary is likely to use a vacuum analogy heavily during this series, because somethings just suck. 3) It isn't our job to solve other people's problems. 4) Life isn't simple. Simple responses to complex issues fall short. 5) Ed was part of a men's bible study that used Adam Hamilton's book, Why? Making Sense of God's Will and found that to be very helpful. We did the same series in November of 2019.

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**September 4, 2022: "Give Me a Reason" – 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**ONE WORSHIP SERVICE at 10:00 a.m.**

**Half Truth:** *Everything happens for a reason (or God works in mysterious ways).*

**Flip the script:** *Whatever happens, God is able to work through it, to redeem it, and to bring good from it.* **Comments:** The best example is how God redeemed the crucifixion with Jesus' resurrection. Flipping the script is not an easy process.

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30: 11-20 (NIV) (refer to Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8, Romans 8: 31-39)

**The Offer of Life or Death**

<sup>11</sup> Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. <sup>12</sup> It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" <sup>13</sup> Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" <sup>14</sup> No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

<sup>15</sup> See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. <sup>16</sup> For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

<sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

<sup>19</sup> This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

**Synopsis:** Our lives are not product of simple chance or predetermined fate. A mix of cause and effect, our actions and the consequences of them, and our choices and the results all play a part in how things turn out. Saying “everything happens for a reason” is too simplistic - downplaying the importance of personal responsibility and putting too much responsibility on God.

**Felt need:** To understand that free will affects our lives

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:** Half Truths promo: [youtube.com/watch?v=g44KNpgbh8I&t=1s](https://youtube.com/watch?v=g44KNpgbh8I&t=1s) Length: 1:02. Cost: Free. Web license: Not sure. They are simple phrases. They sound Christian – like something you might find in the Bible. Web license: Not sure. We’ve all heard these words. Maybe we have said them. They capture some element of truth, yet they miss the point in important ways.

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**NOTE:** This would be a good opportunity to define theological terms like *providence* (God’s governance of the cosmos), *sovereignty* (God’s authority or rule), and *theological determination/predestination* as it relates to *Calvinism* (God has predetermined everything that happens, even our salvation), and *Deism* (God is Creator, but is more like an absentee landlord). It would also be important to explain the *movement of God’s grace* in our lives (*prevenient, justifying, sanctifying*). **Comments:** We might also want to add the terms *dominion* (God gave put man in charge of animals) and *Arminianism* (God is sovereign, but has limited control in relation to man’s freedom and their response to it). Methodism grew out of the Arminianism tradition.

**Pastor Ray Firestone’s reflection on suffering** - pg. 44 of Hamilton’s book:

“Suffering is not God’s desire for us, but it occurs in the process of life. Suffering is not given to teach us something, but through it we may learn. Suffering is not given to punish us, but sometimes it is the consequence of our sin or poor judgment. Suffering does not occur because our faith is weak, but through it our faith may be strengthened. God does not depend on human suffering to achieve his purposes, but sometimes through suffering his purposes are achieved. Suffering can either destroy us, or it can add meaning to our lives.

**Discussion points:** 1) Some people have used this half truth to explain events like 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, Covid, and church splits. Yuck! 2) Deuteronomy: Moses reminds Israel that they can choose life or not. God gave people free will. 3) To believe this half-truth, requires that we blame God for bad things that happen and claim no responsibility for our choices. 4) Calvinism (p. 4): Sue was raised in a Calvinist church and believes that God is all knowing and all-powerful. He knows what we will decide. Rose: Why raise your children in the church if God had predetermined their fate? Sue: We don't know what He has decided and must try to raise them in the faith. Dave: What happens if your child has decided to follow God, but God didn't choose him? Over the course of her career as a nurse, Rose had many deep conversations with physicians about questions of faith, especially predetermination. 5) There are verses to support both sides of the predetermination question, including 1 Peter and Psalm 139 (known before birth) on one side and 1 Corinthians 15 (Christ died for all) on the other side. 6) Our country's founding fathers were deists. 7) Infertility, child abuse, rape, killings, and spousal abuse can't possibly happen for good reasons. Where is the good news? 8) Rose hears radio preachers say that God puts problems in your path and that good will come from it, an approach she finds troubling. 9) We try to make sense of bad things that happen to us. Do we do the same for good things? Jean recalled a time when she was in the car with her mom and felt she needed to turn around and visit her dad's dad who was in a nursing home. She was glad she did as the nurses explained that he was passing. It gave her time to get her grandma so she could sit with him and call her uncles so they could see him one last time. She was happy she could do that as no one did that for her when her dad died. Rose believes Jean was attentive to the Holy Spirit's nudging. 10) How can we give glory to God as we are going through tough times? Do we blame God for our mistakes and forget his grace and forgiveness? Do we live differently because of our beliefs. John Wesley believed that we can fall from grace. What we do matters. 11) Project this mom advice: Make good choices. 12) Interpreting Scripture: Scripture is living and active. It is amazing how different people can read the same passage and interpret it differently – or even the same people reading it at different points in their lives (Ed). God is big enough to love people even if they don't all believe the same (Vicki).

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**September 11, 2022: "God Helps" – 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Half Truth:** God helps those who help themselves.

**Flip the script:** *Grace and mercy show us that God helps those who cannot help themselves.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 121 (NKJV)

121 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—

From whence comes my help?

<sup>2</sup> My help *comes* from the LORD,

Who made heaven and earth.

<sup>3</sup> He will not allow your foot to be moved;

He who keeps you will not slumber.

<sup>4</sup> Behold, He who keeps Israel

Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD *is* your keeper;  
The LORD *is* your shade at your right hand.  
<sup>6</sup>The sun shall not strike you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.  
<sup>7</sup>The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;  
He shall preserve your soul.  
<sup>8</sup>The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in  
From this time forth, and even forevermore.

**Scripture: Matthew 25: 31-40 (MSG) The Sheep and the Goats**

<sup>31-33</sup> “When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

<sup>34-36</sup> “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me,  
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,  
I was homeless and you gave me a room,  
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,  
I was sick and you stopped to visit,  
I was in prison and you came to me.’

<sup>37-40</sup> “Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

**Scripture: Ephesians 2: 4-10 (NIV)**

**Key verse: 2:8**

<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

**Synopsis:** Prayer and worship empower us to action even as we trust in God who is our help and is working for good. From a practical standpoint, we need help from others. From a spiritual standpoint, we’re called to help others as a reflection of God’s love, and we need God’s grace to sustain and lead us to deeper faith.

**Felt need:** To recognize our need for help - from God and each other

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Acknowledgment of 9/11 in prayer

**Media possibilities:** “Did You Know that “God Helps Those Who Help Themselves” Isn’t in the Bible?” Length: 0:57. Cost: Free. Web license: Not sure. [youtube.com/watch?v=Qj3hxCtn-gw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj3hxCtn-gw) Related resource: <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2017/06/did-you-know-the-saying-god-helps-those-who-help-themselves-isnt-in-the-bible/>

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:** Mister Rogers - *Look for the helpers.*

**Social media:**

**NOTE:** This is the first Sunday of fall programming.

*Ora et labora* - “pray and work”

**Discussion points:** 1) Today’s half-truth is partly biblical. Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians points to the connection between work and eating. 2) Ben Franklin first coined the phrase in “Poor Richard’s Almanac.” This half-truth is highly American. You don’t hear it in other cultures. 3) Has anyone ever had a time when they have not needed help? 4) The Holy Spirit is called our Helper. 4) We were created to be creators. We all have a purpose and one is to help others. 5) Today’s half-truth was often quoted during Covid and given as an explanation of why people should be working instead of drawing unemployment ignoring the costs associated with working such as day care and transportation. How often is this used as a dig at “the poor”? 6) Matthew: You don’t want to be described as a goat. More recently, goats are being used to prevent wildfires by grazing on brush that might start a blaze.

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**September 18, 2022: “It’s Too Much” – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Half Truth:** God won’t give you more than you can handle.

**Flip the script:** *God helps us to handle the adversity and struggle we face in life.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 46: 1-11 (NIRV)

- <sup>1</sup> God is our place of safety. He gives us strength.  
He is always there to help us in times of trouble.
- <sup>2</sup> The earth may fall apart.  
The mountains may fall into the middle of the sea.  
But we will not be afraid.
- <sup>3</sup> The waters of the sea may roar and foam.  
The mountains may shake when the waters rise.  
But we will not be afraid.
- <sup>4</sup> God’s blessings are like a river. They fill the city of God with joy.  
That city is the holy place where the Most High God lives.
- <sup>5</sup> Because God is there, the city will not fall.  
God will help it at the beginning of the day.
- <sup>6</sup> Nations are in disorder. Kingdoms fall.  
God speaks, and the people of the earth melt in fear.

- <sup>7</sup> The LORD who rules over all is with us.  
The God of Jacob is like a fort to us.
- <sup>8</sup> Come and see what the LORD has done.  
See the places he has destroyed on the earth.
- <sup>9</sup> He makes wars stop from one end of the earth to the other.  
He breaks every bow. He snaps every spear.  
He burns every shield with fire.
- <sup>10</sup> He says, "Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be honored among the nations.  
I will be honored in the earth."
- <sup>11</sup> The LORD who rules over all is with us.  
The God of Jacob is like a fort to us.

**Scripture: I Corinthians 10: 13 (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. **But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.** ← Context matters

**Scripture: Hebrews 13: 1-8 (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup> Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup> Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

<sup>4</sup> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. <sup>5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you;  
never will I forsake you."

<sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence,

**"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can mere mortals do to me?"**

← Encouragement

<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

**Synopsis:** Though we want to encourage one another in tough times, attributing struggles to God isn't helpful or faithful. Assuming that anyone should be able to "handle" struggles is also not caring or faithful to our calling as followers of Jesus. We can, however, trust that God will never leave us or forsake us.

**Felt need:** To know that we are not alone in difficult times and that we can lean on God and others

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:** "What God Hath Promised" by Annie Johnson Flint.

*God hath not promised skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;*

*God hath not promised sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor, light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.*

*God hath not promised we shall not know  
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;  
He hath not told us we shall not bear  
Many a burden, many a care.*

*God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,  
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;  
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,  
Never a river, turbid and deep.*

This poem is the  
opposite message of  
the prosperity gospel.

**Activity:** Third graders receive bibles.

**Media possibilities:** We have used the first video before, but it is worth repeating this week.

- "Be Still." Length: 1:55. Cost: We own it. Used: March 2018, Oct. 2021, June 2022. Fr. Richard Rohr's prayer comes from Psalm 46:10 of the Hebrew Scriptures: "Be still and know that I am God." <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/>
- "Faith in the Desert." Length: 2:40. Cost: \$20.00. God is in control eve when we fail, even in times of doubt. [sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/74110/faith-in-the-desert](https://sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/74110/faith-in-the-desert)
- "When Storms Come." Length: 2:07. Cost: \$19.98 (\$11.99 before Aug. 20). Web license: Yes. Where is God when we feel lost in the storms of life? The Bible says our hope in God is the anchor for the soul. But what if we can't feel His presence during the storm? [sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/26201/when-storms-come](https://sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/26201/when-storms-come)

**Music:**

**Children's Time:**

**Social media:** Eric Clapton meme – Then I remembered what I had heard about surrender, something I thought I could never do, my pride just wouldn't allow it, but I knew that on my own I wasn't going to make it, so I asked for help, and, getting down on my knees, I surrendered. – Eric Clapton, SOBRIETY BY THE GRACE OF GOD ©

**NOTE:** Another phrase that people hear in difficult times is "I don't know how you do it." For those who are living through it, a response that they might want to give us is, "I don't have a choice." **Others:** "God didn't give this to me." "What!? You think I can't do it?" "I am exhausted. Why don't you offer to help?"

**Discussion points:** 1) When did you hear this half-truth? Rose heard it when her children were young, she was working full-time, and caring for her elderly parents. Jean heard it when she was caring for her mom. Carole, Vicki, and Karen Post all heard it when they had cancer. Karen also heard it when her mom passed. The difference for Karen was that she heard it as encouragement. Until this discussion, it hadn't really occurred to her that others might not take it that way. How we hear words and who says them to you matter. We might be able to offer ourselves encouragement if we repeat them. We don't need to

make ourselves feel guilty about being overwhelmed. 2) Barb: It might be easier to blame God for bad situations. 3) It can be easier to focus on struggles than on good times, especially if lots of difficult things are happening at the same time. Do we give God thanks for the good times? 4) What does it mean to “handle” something? For several of us, it means getting through an ordeal with our sanity intact; bearing the load or struggles; putting up with stuff we didn’t ask for; and calling on God, our faith, creativity, or helpers to get us through the mess. Just making it through can deepen our faith. 5) Caregiving falls unevenly on the sexes. We wish more people would help than offer words of “encouragement.”

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**September 25, 2022: “God Said It...” – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Half Truth:** God said it, I believe it, that settles it.

**Flip the script:** *With faithful interpretation, God speaks through the words of Scripture to teach, guide, shape, and encourage us.*

**Scripture:** II Timothy 3: 14-17 (NIV) (refer to Deuteronomy 23: 12-14)

<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

**Scripture:** Hebrews 4: 12-13 (NIV) (refer to John 1: 14)

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

**Synopsis:** Scripture is the primary source of the revelation of God, but Scripture is always interpreted with an understanding of who wrote it, when, and why. No one takes every word of Scripture literally, but we seek to understand the truth of Scripture as it forms our understanding of who God is and what God wills for us. In our faith formation, we may end up with more questions as we learn and grow in faith.

**Felt need:** To move beyond “bumper sticker theology” and embrace the questions of faith

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Use a colander as a metaphor for how we listen to Jesus.

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:** What Scripture passage gives you hope and encouragement?

**NOTE:** This is a good opportunity to share about the **Wesleyan quadrilateral** (*Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience*) as a basis for faith development - and the different parts

of Biblical interpretation: scholarship, textual criticism, translation, hermeneutics, exegesis, biases, etc. **Comments:** Methodist theologian, Albert Outler actually coined the phrase, Wesleyan quadrilateral. Pastor Mary like the quadrilateral graphic with lenses.

**Discussion points:** 1) If you have ever been in a situation where more than one language is spoken, like the Ivanov household, you realize the difficulty in translating words accurately. How much more difficult it is with Scripture? Not only was it written down by people speaking different languages, but the meaning of words changes over time and different languages do not all have words with the same nuances of meaning. Context is important too. 2) Ed likes to ask people who quote scripture and say they follow all of it if they tithe. Tithing is scriptural. 3) Leviticus has 613 laws to follow. 4) Meme from Kevin Nye: In the gospels, Jesus is asked 187 questions. He answers (maybe) 8 of them. He himself asks 307. Maybe faith isn't about certainty, but learning to ask --- and sit in the complexity of --- good questions. 5) This half-truth might be more convincing if it started with, "Jesus said it...." 6) Which scripture passages trouble you? Jean doesn't like 1 Timothy's ideas on the place of women. 7) Jim noted that in both Disciple Bible and the Men's Group, he is amazed at how differently people interpret the same passages. It isn't any wonder that there are so many bible translations, denominations and denominational splits. Related question: Why don't more people think like me? 8) Do people care as much their church's deep theological questions as they do about being welcomed? 9) In years past, community was centered in and around the church. Now more people find community outside the church, especially in sports. 10) Narrow-mindedness: Betty's Gary spent three days in a cockpit with another pilot who was convinced Gary would go to hell since he did not believe the "right things." Karen B.'s Missy often talks about that same narrow-mindedness, although she says things are different at Lake Harbor. We know that our members are not all of the same mind, but probably agree on the most important point. 11) Scripture is not consistent. Ivan had his citizenship interview in Detroit around 2004 or 2005. When it was over, the interviewer asked Mary what she thought about scripture saying that men should be the spiritual head of the household. She was glad she remembered a verse about doing all things out of reverence for Christ. 12) Jim had many deep discussions with his ex-boss who was Christian Reformed. He asked Jim how he dealt with a woman pastor. Jim replied that he learned more from the women than the men. 13) Lake Harbor has had many women pastors. Vicki recalled a young Enya asking if a man could be a pastor. 14) Women were the first to call Jesus Lord and meet him after his resurrection.

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**October 2, 2022: "Just Love" – 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
World Communion Sunday, CROP Walk

**\*Half Truth:** Love the sinner, hate the sin.

**Flip the script:** *Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Love one another as Jesus loves you.*

**\*Comments:** The origins of this phrase come from two authors, St. Augustine and Mahatma Gandhi. The earliest use of this phrase comes from St. Augustine in a letter he wrote to a commune of nuns (Letter 211, c. 424). In this letter he encourages them to act *with love for the persons and hatred of sins*.

The modern rendering of the phrase comes from Mahatma Gandhi's 1929 autobiography. He writes: [the phrase] "*hate the sin and not the sinner* is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world." Gandhi argues that using this phrase is an excuse to judge another person because it cannot be effectively practice.

**Scripture:** Matthew 7: 1-5 (CEB)

7 "Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. <sup>2</sup> You'll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the splinter that's in your brother's or sister's eye, but don't notice the log in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' when there's a log in your eye? <sup>5</sup> You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's or sister's eye.

**Scripture:** Romans 3: 21-26 (NIV)     **Righteousness Through Faith**

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

**Synopsis:** Jesus is God Incarnate, came to save sinners, and calls us to love God and one another. As soon as we pay more attention to others' sin rather than focusing on our own, we're moving to a place of judgment and self-righteousness, which we're warned not to do. Instead, we can follow Jesus and focus on God's forgiveness and grace for ourselves and others.

**Felt need:** To pay more attention to our own spiritual lives, judge others less, and view one another as neighbors whom we're called to love

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:**

- "Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin?" Length: 1:20. A short clip from Adam Hamilton. [youtube.com/watch?v=rSBQQTahoXM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSBQQTahoXM)
- "What If." Length: 1:47. Cost: Free with subscription. Web license: Yes. What if love was greater than the darkest night? This colorfully illustrated mini movie asks us to reflect on the reality that God's love for us in Christ truly is far greater than any darkness, pain, or loss we might experience in this life. [playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/57535/what-if](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/57535/what-if)

**Music:**

**Children's Time:**

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Jean’s mom always said, “Judge not, let ye be judged.” 2) We step over a line when we start looking at other people’s sin. Judging is an issue of pride. How can we separate a person’s behavior from the person? Jesus never used these words. He said to love both neighbors and sinners. 3) When people are asked to leave the church over a sin (example: Catholics divorcing), are chastised and hurt, it is no wonder they might choose to leave church entirely. 4) Sin is sin. Why do we try to weigh which ones are worse? On a loosely related note: Do we keep score, giving ourselves points for good things, hoping they outweigh the bad things? 5) The United Methodist discipline says that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. How can we separate sexuality from who we are? 3) Loving enemies: There is a [powerful book](#) of holy week pictures of Jesus washing the feet of people we might consider enemies.

**Related devotion:** Aug. 10, 2022, The United Methodist Fellowship:

### “Division”

*Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?  
No, I tell you, but rather division! – Luke 49: 51*

He’s not wrong. Jesus isn’t lying here. He didn’t come to bring peace to the earth and hand it out indiscriminately like sandwiches at a picnic. No.

He came to teach, and what he taught us was to love everybody and to take special care of the lonely and poor and oppressed, and we, being very human, don’t like that.

We don’t like everybody. Our seventh-grade clique mentality has not completely left us and we like excluding. It is much easier to divide than to unite and it makes us feel special and part of something. It’s a completely human reaction, but Jesus wants us to do better than that. He wants us to love everybody. We don’t want to.

But we pray for help, and we inch our way toward the life Jesus want us to lead, and the more seriously we take his words, the more dramatically our lives change. Then at some point we realize that we aren’t who we used to be and that, in fact, this path had led to division – families in disagreement, workplaces that don’t support the person we are becoming, churches who don’t actually want the least and last to show up at the door.

The life Jesus calls us to is uncomfortable. It stretches us. But in the stretching, we grow more like Christ and we grow in our capacity to love without boundaries. We learn to actually follow and live like Jesus.

And isn’t that the whole point?

- Lindy Thompson

**Pray:** Sometimes I am afraid to pray for your will to be done in my life, God, because I suspect what that might mean. Please give me courage to pray, and to mean it, and the strength to take steps in your direction. Amen.