

## What Does It Mean to be Methodist?

*Revised from a document authored by The Woodlands Church in Texas.*

The decision to affiliate with another Methodist denomination or remain independent is an important one: Which option best aligns with our mission of Making Disciples for Jesus Christ Here, There, and Everywhere?

### What Does It Mean to be Methodist?

The Methodist denomination is grounded in traditional Christian doctrines and Methodist disciplines:

- The authority of Holy Scripture
- God's grace for all
- Discipleship as essential
- Service to others in the name of Christ

The Methodist movement began as an 18<sup>th</sup> century revival movement within the Church of England, led primarily by two brothers, John and Charles Wesley, who wanted *"to reform the Continent, and especially the Church, and spread scriptural holiness across the land."* This desire has led people called Methodists to structure churches in a certain way and have certain theological beliefs that are different from our brothers and sisters who are Presbyterian, Lutheran or Baptist.

### Grace

Methodists are a people who emphasize the amazing grace of God in Jesus Christ. Rather than preaching a gospel of wrath and condemnation, Methodists preach a gospel of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. John and Charles Wesley preached and taught that the grace of God has three distinct but related facets which are available to everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike. This also defines the term "Wesleyan Theology."

- *Prevenient Grace:* Prevenient grace is a free gift to everyone meant to draw us closer to God. This grace is experienced in a myriad of ways from the blessings of a beautiful sunrise, to a smile from a stranger, to a healing relief from an ailment. Prevenient grace is meant to bring us to a place of Justifying Grace.
- *Justifying Grace:* Justifying grace is the grace that saves us. When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and repent of our sins, we receive His atoning sacrifice for our sins and are made right with God. We are justified.
- *Sanctifying Grace:* Sanctifying grace is growing in the grace, knowledge, and love of God in Christ Jesus. John Wesley taught that we should be striving for sanctification as we continually grow in our faith, make disciples of Jesus Christ, and help others grow in their faith.

### Discipleship

John and Charles Wesley did not seek to begin a new denomination. Instead, they wished to reform the Church of England by creating small groups of believers. The primary way for the early Methodists to grow in grace according to the Wesley's was through a smaller group of believers: regional gatherings comprised of approximately 50 members; groups of approximately 10-12 people who wanted to grow in their faith; and smaller, same-sex groups of 6 believers who held each other accountable for their walk with Christ. The Wesley's believed that true discipleship and life transformation happened not just during Sunday morning, but all throughout the week.

### Service

Christ calls us to help those in need. John Wesley wrote, *"There is no holiness but social holiness."* He knew the church should transform the world not just through evangelism, but also by being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. His vision was to share the gospel and grace of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Believing in the authority of Holy Scripture, that God's grace is for all, that discipleship to Christ is a priority, and that we are called to help the less fortunate is consistent with Methodism.