

# WHO ARE WE?

A JOURNEY FROM  
HEAD TO HEART

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BY BISHOP LATRELLE MILLER EASTERLING &  
THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

## WHY THIS STUDY NOW?

Our beloved denomination is in the midst of another pivotal moment in history. Globally, in our churches, we are considering the future of the denomination, what it means to be the Church, what it means to be United Methodists, and what it means to be spirit-filled Christ followers making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in this present age. Some may question, “Will we remain united? Will we create a new form of unity? Will we dissolve? Will the Church continue to be able to give a faithful voice and witness to the will of God in the days ahead? What is the will of God?” There are many conversations and many questions that may arise in our uncertainty. We can see the ground shift as we engage in strategic sessions, pour over new plans, and predict the year to come. These are natural and necessary steps. And in the midst of all of our uncertainty, this we know for sure – God is. God is with us and God’s Spirit has the power to birth in us a common understanding of how we might live together, disciple together, love together and serve God together.

This Bible Study was developed so that we might enter into a process of discernment and wonder together. It isn’t meant to cater to one outcome or cajole participants into a certain line of thinking. Rather, receive this study as an invitation into communal dialogue chiefly interested in our common roots and the common interest we share as United Methodists within the universal body of Christ today.

This study was designed to center us in our core identity. And so we ask – Who are we? Who are we as the people of God? Who are we as the people called Methodists shaped by Wesleyan theology? Who are we as the members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference? Who are we becoming as we journey on toward perfection? It is our deepest hope that you will allow responses to emerge around the room and that you will receive these responses with great care. Furthermore, it is our hope that as we study and wrestle with Scripture alongside people we know, and hopefully with people we do not know so well, that we will pay close attention to and compassionately engage one another, quiet ourselves and await God’s voice in our discernment in order to make room for emerging responses that can guide us.

# PART 1 WHO ARE WE AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

## Table of Contents

A Guide .....	4
Understanding and Interacting with the Sacred Text	
What to Expect	
Group Study Suggestions	
Who Are We Affirmation .....	5
Part 1 Overview .....	6
Week 1: Exploring the Nature of God .....	7
Week 2: Learning Lessons from the Garden .....	11
Week 3: Remembering Our Story .....	15
Week 4: Embracing God's Many Names .....	19
Week 5: Visioning and Prophesying .....	23
Week 6: Liberating .....	27
Index of Part 1 Resources .....	31
Appendix A: Additional Ground Rules .....	32
Preview of Parts 2 and 3 .....	34
An Expression of Gratitude .....	36

Please let us know if your church is engaging in the study and with whom so that we might pray for your time together and provide additional materials and support as needed. Visit <http://eepurl.com/dLch3/>.

## A GUIDE

As you begin this study, we invite leaders and participants to explore and reflect on the following materials, which will enrich the group's experience.

### UNDERSTANDING AND INTERACTING WITH THE SACRED TEXT

The Word of God is our Word, meant to speak to us now and inform our lives and our discipleship; the Word of God is a breathing expression between Creator and Creation, alive and at work with us.

What would it mean for us, as United Methodists, if we presupposed that others love God as much as we do; that others have dedicated themselves to follow Christ as passionately and faithfully as we have; that others open themselves to the movement and truth of the Holy Spirit as we do? Might we presuppose that others hold Scripture as sacred and precious as we do?

In these presuppositions, we free ourselves (as much as humanly possible) from the bondage of judgment, ridicule, superiority, dismissal and disdain. We open ourselves, not to the possibility of losing our faith, but to the possibility of seeing through a different lens and thereby understanding from another perspective. At the conclusion of this study, we hope that you can have a deeper appreciation of how others view God and a deeper understanding of our own view. In our view finder, we just might make out more fully who God is calling us to be as United Methodists and as the Baltimore-Washington Conference at this particular moment.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

You won't find an exhaustive and definitive study here. You will find a wholehearted attempt to capture frames of current critical conversations that we need to have as a people of faith. You are invited to bring your experience to this content as you share with others in your community. Do so knowing that there are fellow United Methodists throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference engaging the same material, sharing their own experiences with one another, and listening attentively to what the Spirit would yet teach us. May God's grace be sufficient for the journey ahead. To God be the Glory!

Expect to learn something new in your brave space as you journey through the study using the Who Are We Affirmation.

Intentionally set aside time to meditate on the Scriptures, pray, be in conversation with one another and grow in fellowship with one another. You will also have an opportunity to interact with 8-12 minutes of video content from several conversation partners across our connection.

### GROUP STUDY SUGGESTIONS

As you approach this study, please keep in mind that there is no one "right way" to engage together. As your group develops a shared culture, remember that you are taking up a collective lens. Each person's contribution brings a new opportunity for shared creativity and wisdom.

We have included some tools for creating safe and bold spaces. As a first activity, begin your study with the Who Are We Affirmation and make modifications as necessary. We have also included guidelines for RESPECTful Communication and Mutual Invitation (Appendix A) to help maintain a space where each voice is honored.

Stay curious. Even if your fellow group members are deeply known to you, prepare to be surprised by how God's grace will show up in and through each participant. Celebrate that groups across our Conference are affirming the Spirit's presence with us in this season through shared study. Your holy conversations as a group are a part of a larger sacred dialogue. Each time you gather, you contribute to the widening perspective of our faith and the wideness of God's mercy alive among us.

## WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

In the gift of this moment, **we affirm** that we are divinely loved and lovable.

We are the **children of God**.

**Together**, we will **learn** from the actions and words of one another. **Christ's** lessons on love are **centered** in how we treat others and in how we treat ourselves.

We will exercise **courage** in this study as we share stories of **struggle** and **strength**.

We will **stay at the table** and receive those stories with **grace**.

We will not be afraid to **launch into the deep**.

We will **commit** to the vulnerability necessary **to allow God** to break us open.

We will set and **respect** boundaries and **honor** confidentiality together.

When uncertainty arises, we will remember the **Spirit of "peace** that passes our own understanding" and can intercede for us.

We will **remember** that even when we don't feel "United," the **uniting love of Christ** can reveal a pathway to greater **wisdom** and mutual respect.

No matter what, **there is a place for each one** of us in this study together.

Let us **hold each other up** in prayer, hold each other **accountable** in love, and **trust** that our God is making **all things new**.

Thank you for the gift of **being present** to one another in this holy time.



## PART 1

# WHO ARE WE AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

[What is the nature of God?<sup>1</sup>](#)

Part one of the three-part study takes a deep dive into exploring who we are as God's children. Out of that, we are invited to reflect on where we have missed living out of our divine inheritance both personally and as a gathered community of faith. "Who are We as the People of God?" begins with seeking fresh insights into the nature of God, examines our identities as enslaved people and continues with our journey through wilderness toward ongoing liberation of bondage and celebrating that freedom. Discover what it means to live out of the fullness of our identity in God and bless multitudes as a result.

<sup>1</sup>In the pdf version of this guide all links are embedded (if you can click on them, you will be taken to the resource). For those using a printed copy, a list of tiny URLs is available in the index.





Our faith and our understanding of church is often defined by how we view the nature of God. As people created in the divine image, we are called to seek an ever-growing knowledge of the nature of God and to let that knowledge shape our lives.

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** [John Wesley on the Character of God](#)

**Scriptures:** Genesis 2:4b-9; Genesis 3:1-13a and 21; John 1:14-18; 1 Corinthians 13

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Mysterious and Majestic God, You are with us. Thank You for the gift of your transformational presence. By the power of Your Spirit, You've transformed the dust of earth into a living soul. Center us in You as we launch out into the deep.

With each breath, fill us with your Spirit and cause us to be born anew.

With our lives, let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

With our hearts and minds, love through us so that we can wholeheartedly love one another.

Guide us, Holy Wonder, and reveal Yourself as the One who makes us One.

*Amen.*

See page 5.

with Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling

Bishop Easterling is the episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.




## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION

1. Our family of origin can profoundly influence how we understand God's nature. Which image resonates more for you: God as a loving parent, God as a ruling monarch, or another that you might name? Explain as you are comfortable.

2. How would you describe to another the mystery of God? How do you worship that God?

3. Take a moment, look inside yourself and reflect back on that image that came to mind during Bishop Easterling's video. What image of God did you envision and how does that translate into who or what you prioritize and privilege? How does placing God in one culture, race or gender place limits on the fullness of God's being?



**"Inherent in God is Mystery."**  
Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling



## CLOSING PRAYER



## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

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Use these open-ended questions to facilitate your introspection:

How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas appropriate for growth and transformation?

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What one thing are you going to do differently this week?

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Write about one attribute of the nature of God that is meaningful to you and why. What is one way you might enact that attribute with someone you encounter in the week ahead? If you're comfortable, take that action and share the results with someone in your group.

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment to apply what you learned (and then pray it).

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“God has been pleased to reveal only some of his attributes in his word. In the Bible, we learn that God is an eternal Being. As he ever was, so he ever will be; as there was no beginning of his existence, so there will be no end.

“Nearly allied to the eternity of God, is his omnipresence. As he exists through infinite duration, so he cannot but exist through infinite space; according to his own question, equivalent to the strongest assertion.

“This one, eternal, omnipresent Being is likewise all-perfect. He has, from eternity to eternity, all the perfections and infinitely more than it ever did, or ever can, enter into the heart of man to conceive; yea, infinitely more than the angels in heaven can conceive; These perfections we usually term, the attributes of God.

“And he is omnipotent, as well as omnipresent; there can be no more bounds to his power, than to his presence. He does whatsoever pleases him, in the heavens, the earth, the sea, and in all deep places.

“The omniscience of God is a clear and necessary consequence of his omnipresence. If he is present in every part of the universe, he cannot but know whatever is, or is done there. His eyes are not only “over all the earth, beholding the evil and the good;” but likewise over the whole creation, even the paths of uncreated night. Is there any difference between his knowledge and his wisdom? If there be, is not his knowledge the more general term, (at least, according to our weak conceptions) and his wisdom a particular branch of it; namely, the knowing the end of everything that exists, and the means of applying it to that end.

“Holiness is another of the attributes of the almighty, all-wise God. He is infinitely distant from every touch of evil. He ‘is light; and in him is no darkness at all.’ He is a God of unblemished justice and truth; but above all is his mercy.

“This God is a Spirit; not having such a body, such parts or passions, as people have. God ‘called into being all that is;’ created the heavens and the earth, together with all that they contain.”

Paraphrased and excerpted from: [The Unity of The Divine Being](#), by John Wesley

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Book:** [Blowing the Lid Off the God-Box: Opening Up to the Limitless Faith](#) by Rev. Anne Robertson
- **Movie:** [Bruce Almighty \(2003\)](#)
- **John Wesley Sermon:** [The Unity of The Divine Being](#), “There is one God.” Mark 12:32, April 9, 1789



WHO ARE WE AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

## WEEK 2: LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE GARDEN

WITH REV. DR ELIEZER VALENTÍN-CASTAÑÓN

We were created to be God's image-bearers. But what happens when we distort that image or, even worse, presume that we know the will of God? What lessons do we have to learn from the Garden of Eden and from Golgotha? What does it mean to be in relationship with God?

### PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

Article: [Stewardship for creation in context](#)

Scriptures: Genesis 1:26-31, 3:1-13 (14-19), 20-24, Romans 8:31-39

### SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

#### OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, with great intention, time and creativity, You gave form and light to an empty and dark world. Thank you. You've created the heavens and the earth, the great creatures of the sea and every living thing in it. You've formed humanity in Your image, in Your likeness, and You've blessed us with a timeless blessing. Thank you. By the power of Your Word, You've called us out of nothingness to become spiritual beings enclosed in flesh. You have called us to be bearers of Your Divine Image. Thank you. As we study, give us an understanding of the power and work that You require of us. Your infinite dignity blesses our finite humanity. Your grace meets us at the point of our need and equips us for this journey. Thank you, Holy One. Go deeper with us as we go deeper in love with you, ourselves, and one another. Center us with every breath in the fullness of time to be born anew. In Jesus' Name, we pray. *Amen.*

See page 5.

with Rev. Dr. Eliezer Valentín-Castañón



1. God created us in God's image, and too often, we return the favor – creating God in our image, at our own peril. Looking back on Eden, describe the relationships between God and the characters in the garden. How do they impact and inform us today?

2. According to John Wesley, "all pride is idolatry; it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone." Where is pride or arrogance evident in your life?

3. In the video, Rev. Dr. Valentín-Castañón said that Jesus calls us to live into the reality of the image of God – *the imago dei*. “This is a call God has placed on every human heart.” Do you feel that call on your own heart? If so, how do you live it out?



## CLOSING PRAYER

## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

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How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas appropriate for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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To be a child of God and follower of Jesus means dying to yourself and taking up one's cross. What does that mean to you in your life right now? Choose one way this week you will intentionally claim and grow in your discipleship. Live out that intention.

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment to apply what you learned, and then pray it.

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"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Gen. 6:5. "In his natural state, every person born into the world is a rank idolater. Perhaps, indeed, we may not be such in the vulgar sense of the word. We do not, like the idolatrous Heathens, worship molten or graven images. We do not bow down to the stock of a tree, to the work of our own hands. We do not pray to the angels or saints in heaven, any more than to the saints that are upon the earth. But what then? We have set up our idols in our hearts; and to these we bow down and worship them: We worship ourselves, when we pay that honor to ourselves which is due to God only. Therefore, all pride is idolatry; it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone. And although pride was not made for man, yet where is the man that is born without it But hereby, we rob God of his unalienable right, and idolatrously usurp his glory."

Paraphrased and excerpted from: [Original Sin by John Wesley](#)

"The first advice I would give those who have been saved from sin by grace is to watch and pray continually against pride. For it is pride not only to ascribe what we have to ourselves, but also to think we have what we do not. One man, for instance, ascribed his knowledge to God and therefore was humble. But then he thought that he had more knowledge than everyone else which is dangerous pride. We often think we have no need of anyone's advice or reproof. Always remember, much grace does not imply much enlightenment. We may be wise but have little love, or we may have love with little wisdom. God has wisely joined us all together as parts of the body so that we cannot say to one another, 'I have no need of you.'

"Even to imagine that those who are unsaved cannot teach you is a very great and serious mistake. Dominion is not found in grace. Not observing this has led some into many mistakes and certainly into pride. Beware of even the appearance of pride. Let there be in you that lowly mind which was in Christ Jesus. Be clothed with humility. Let modesty appear in all your words and actions.

"One way to do this is to own any fault we have. If you have at any time thought, spoken, or acted wrong, do not refrain from acknowledging it. Never dream that this will hurt the cause of God--in fact, it will further it. Be open and honest when you are rebuked and do not seek to evade it or disguise it. Rather, let it appear just as it is and you will thereby not hinder but adorn the gospel."

Excerpted from Christian Perfection by John Wesley, comes from Devotional Classics (edited by Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith) pp. 258-259.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Essay:** "[Faith in Gods and in God](#)," by Richard Niebuhr. This essay distinguishes active faith from belief.
- **Movie:** Do the Right Thing (1989)
- **Book:** [The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1](#) by J. Richard Middleton
- **John Wesley Sermon:** [Original Sin](#)





The stories of Exodus belong to every generation. They introduce us to God's deliverance and the possibilities of new life. But that doesn't mean we can avoid the hardships of the wilderness or that we should shrink from the unexpected ways God can deliver us.

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

Ted Talk: ["The Danger of a Single Story,"](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Read: The book of Exodus

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Way and Waymaker, God of the Way out also known as God of the Exodus: Your love meets us here.

Thank You for attending to the cries of Your people.

Thank You for being the God who is with us.

Thank You for journeying with us through every circumstance and for sitting with us in times of joy, sorrow, grief, fear, frustration, unbelief, and/or discontent.

In this moment, release us from all that binds us. Strengthen us, as we wholeheartedly follow You. Give us a deeper understanding of Your will and more grace to understand one another.

Sojourner God, lead the way. In Jesus' Name, we pray.

*Amen.*

# WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

See page 5.

## VIDEO

with Rev. Dr. Bruce Birch

Rev. Dr. Birch retired as Dean of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.



## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION

1. God heard the cries of the Hebrew people even though they didn't know God's Name. Who may be crying out, yet not know God's Name today? Describe the places where you feel at the "edge of the sea" with the army pressing in.

2. As God is present with us in our suffering, are we to be present with others in their suffering? And if so, how?

3. God who is present in our human story, delivers humanity from suffering in unexpected ways. How does God enlist us as God's image-bearers in divine deliverance?



## CLOSING PRAYER

## BEYOND THE SESSION

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Use these open-ended questions to facilitate your introspection:

How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas appropriate for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Identify a group of people or situation in your community that calls out to your heart. Who might go with you to build relationship and learn from the group of people impacted?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment to apply what you learned, and then pray it.

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"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." John 16:22

"If darkness comes upon you by heavy and unexpected temptations, the best way of removing and preventing this is to teach believers to always expect temptation, seeing they dwell in an evil world, among wicked, subtle, malicious spirits, and have a heart capable of all evil. Convince them that the whole work of sanctification does not, as they imagined, happen all at once; they may expect many storms before they come to the full stature of Christ. Above all, let them be instructed, when the storm is upon them, not to reason with the devil, but to pray; to pour out their souls before God, and show him of their trouble. ... God will bear witness to his word, and bring their souls out of trouble. He will say, 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' Yea, and that light, if thou walk humbly and closely with God, will 'shine more and more unto the perfect day.'"

Paraphrased and excerpted from: ["The Wilderness State"](#) by John Wesley

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Book Chapter:** [Chapter Four "Bondage, Exodus, Wilderness"](#) from *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Peterson
- **Movie:** [Schindler's List \(1993\)](#)
- **John Wesley's Sermon:** ["The Wilderness State"](#)



God is the ultimate source from which all things find their meaning and purpose. But in the Hebrew Bible, there is no word for God. Rather, God is known by many names. By what names do you know God, and how do the names you choose have the potential to transform the world?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

Article: [In the midst of the mess: Hagar and the God Who Sees](#) by Amy R. Buckley

Scriptures: Exodus 3:13-15; Genesis 15:22-26; 16:13-14; 22:9-14

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Magnificent God, your grace *individually* called us here by name.

You know who we've been, who we are, and who we are becoming.

You've journeyed with us into this space and You've promised not to leave us. Transform us. Reveal Yourself. Reveal Your ways. Disclose Your will. Teach us Your Names and illuminate who we are in You.

With every breath, receive the petitions of your children.

Center us on all that is You and all that You call us to do in Your Name and for Your glory.

You're our Healer. You're our Comforter. Name-Giver, All Sufficient One, lead us.

In Jesus' Name, we pray.

*Amen.*

## WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

See page 5.

## VIDEO

with Rabbi Joshua Martin Siegel

Rabbi Siegel, who is now retired, started and served as rabbi of the Columbia Jewish Center in Columbia, Md.



## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION

1. The only time in Scripture that a human being names God is found in Genesis 16:13. Hagar names God out of her experience, "The God Who Sees Me." If you were to give God a name out of your experience, what would it be?

2. What is the name that you believe that God gave you that you are called to live into?

3. The rabbi shared with us that God can bring seemingly opposites together. If we approach opposites with humility, what points of entrance might we find into the deeper mystery of God?

YHWH

**"The essence of wisdom is humility  
before God."** Rabbi Martin Siegel



## CLOSING PRAYER



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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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This week think of some of the names of God that you seldom use. Say a prayer each day using a different name that expresses various aspects of God's being. Use these names frequently in the prayer. How do the names you use change your prayers and your way of thinking about God?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment to apply what you learned, and then pray it.

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"I dare not insist upon any one's using the word Trinity, or Person. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better: But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them I cannot: Much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, 'Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; yet I scruple using the words Trinity and Persons, because I do not find those terms in the Bible.' I would insist only on the direct words, unexplained, just as they lie in the text: 'There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one.'"

Paraphrased and excerpted from ["On The Trinity"](#) by John Wesley

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Movie:** *The Shack* (2017)
- **An Activity:** Consider the following names of God and reflect upon or journal on which of these names resonate or doesn't resonate with you:
  - El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty)
  - El Elyon (The Most High God)
  - Adonai (Lord, Master)
  - Yahweh (Lord, Jehovah)
  - Jehovah Jireh (The Lord my Provider)
  - Jehovah Nissi (The Lord My Banner)
  - Jehovah-Raah (The Lord My Shepherd)
  - Jehovah Rapha (The Lord That Heals)
  - Jehovah Shammah (The Lord Is There)
- **John Wesley's Sermon:** ["On The Trinity"](#), Cork, Ireland, 1775



The biblical prophets called on the people of their time, and on us today, to “remember who you are,” to remember that you are a child of God. Prophets also remind us that God’s heart resides most profoundly with people in the margins of our culture. How are the voices of ancient prophets relevant to the Church today?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** [Where have all the prophet’s gone?](#)

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 1:1-6; 21-26; Isaiah 40:1-11; Acts 2:14-21

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Omniscient (All-Knowing) God:

Thank You for intentionally gathering us together by Your Spirit. Thank You for being mindful of all of Your creation. You are the reason that we live, move and have our being; and, we are here because of Your mercy. You know all that concerns us. So, we pause before You now to acknowledge Who You Are. (Pause, Selah). You are the God of justice and righteousness; and, You ever call us through the means of grace to live justly and righteously with one another. Embolden our witness and forgive our complicitness with, and/or silence regarding any form of injustice. With every breath, renew our strength, witness, and spirit to make a positive difference wherever You send us.

In Jesus’ Name, we pray.

*Amen.*

See page 5.

with Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle

A professional headshot of Dr. Robert L. Taylor, a Black man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is smiling slightly against a neutral grey background.

1. What is the role of prophets today?

2. Rev. Dr. McMickle teaches that the role of the church is to hold up a mirror to who we are. As we look in the mirror, what are the places of distortion?

### 3. What is the responsibility of the Christian community to the ever expanding problem of poverty here and around the world?



"Remember who you are."  
Mufasa



## CLOSING PRAYER

# BEYOND THE SESSION

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Imagine you were on the receiving end of the prophet’s words from the passages highlighted in Isaiah. What one or two things about your life or your church might you consider changing?

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Write a prayer to ask for God’s support and enlightenment to apply what you learned, and then pray it.

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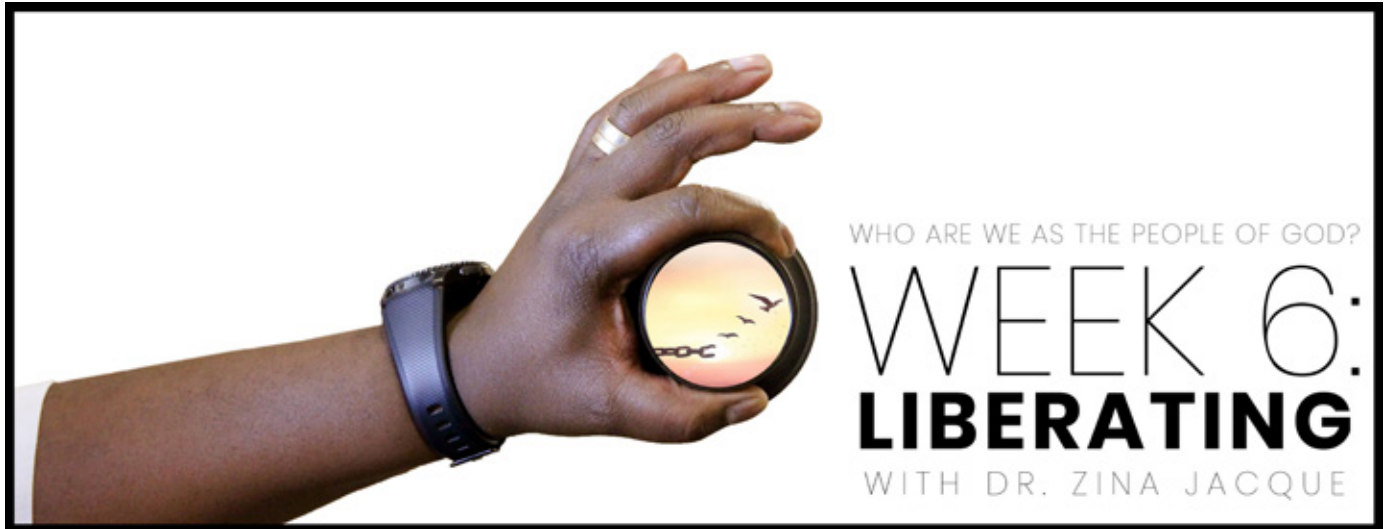
“God has commanded his watchmen to cry aloud, and show the people the danger they are in. For this he has sent his servants, the Prophets, in their succeeding generations, to point out the narrow path, and exhort all men not to be conformed to this world. Every broad way is infallibly a false one. Therefore, this is one plain, sure rule, ‘They who teach men to walk in a broad way, a way that many walk in, are false prophets.’ Again: The true way to heaven is a narrow way. Therefore, this is another plain, sure rule, ‘They who do not teach men to walk in a narrow way, to be singular, are false prophets.’”

Paraphrased and excerpted from: [Sermon on the Mount](#) by John Wesley

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Books:**
  - *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, David W. Blight
  - *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second Edition, Walter Brueggemann
- **Movie:** [Selma \(2015\)](#)
- **John Wesley's Sermon:** [Sermon on the Mount, 12](#)





Each of us is on a journey from brokenness, to healing, to wholeness that echoes the Exodus sojourn. What does Israel's story of traveling from oppression to liberation have in common with our own? What should we expect to encounter as we seek God's path of liberation?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

Sermon: John Wesley's ["New Creation"](#)

Scriptures: Exodus 12:37-42; Numbers 33:1-56; Ephesians 2:11-20

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Liberating God:

You have called us into existence and community for such a time as this. We pause before You to acknowledge Your presence and power available to each of us this day.

(Pause, Selah).

Receive all that we lay at Your feet and transform it for Your glory. You have given us Your liberating power. We receive it.

May we use it to transform our lives, community and world. Lead us in this time of study, introspection and renewal. Heal. Save. Deliver.

In Jesus' Name, we pray.

Amen.

See page 5.

with Rev. Dr. Zina Jacque

Rev. Dr. Zina Jacque is pastor of Community Church of Barrington in Barrington, Ill.



## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION

1. In the video, Rev. Dr. Jacques lifted up the story of the Israelites under Pharaoh. What is an appropriate response when God is seeking liberation but we benefit from the oppression?

2. On the journey of liberation, what difficulties must we confront to fully live into the sweetness of God in our midst?

3. How have you experienced Christ's presence with you on the journey toward liberation?

A stack of Polaroid photos is positioned on the left side of a white background with horizontal grey lines. The top Polaroid photo features a vibrant sunset or sunrise scene with a chain of links stretching across the lower portion. Several birds are captured in flight, appearing to fly along the chain. Below the image, the text "Let us begin, together." is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Underneath this, in a smaller, regular font, is the name "Rev. Dr. Zina Jacque". The Polaroid has a white border and is slightly offset to the right, revealing another similar photo underneath it.

## CLOSING PRAYER

## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

Often, when we become reflexively resistant to what we've experienced through study, it is pointing towards an area worthy of more reflection and prayer. In this part of study, we invite you to examine your areas of resistance or struggle. Allow God to reveal how transformation can occur in those areas.

Use these open-ended questions to facilitate your introspection:

How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas appropriate for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Where have you wrestled? Where have you grown? What do you understand differently about Who We Are As the People of God?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment to apply what you learned, and then pray it.

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### PART 1 WRAP UP

What do you understand differently about who we are as the people of God?

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"Behold, I make all things new." Rev. 21:5.

"But the most glorious of all will be the change that will take place among the poor, sinful, miserable children of men. The people had fallen in many respects, as from a greater height, so into a lower depth, than any other part of the creation. But they shall 'hear a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men: And he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be their God.' (Rev. 21:3, 4.) Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise. In how beautiful a manner is this described by the Apostle: 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: For the former things are done away!' As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin."

Paraphrase and excerpted from: ["The New Creation"](#) by John Wesley

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Movie:** [A Force More Powerful \(1999\)](#). A documentary about liberation movements across the world.
- **Book:**
  - ["Seeing God in Each Other,"](#) ed. By Sheryl Kujawa Holbrook
  - ["America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege and the Bridge to a New America,"](#) by Jim Wallis
- **John Wesley's Sermon:** ["The New Creation"](#)

# INDEX OF PART 1 RESOURCES

BWCUMC.ORG/WHOAREWELINKS

Watch: What is the Nature of God?, <http://tiny.cc/sehbdz>

## WEEK 1: EXPLORING THE NATURE OF GOD

Watch: Bishop Easterling, <http://tiny.cc/bishopvideo>

Read: John Wesley on the Character of God, <http://tiny.cc/characterofgod>

Read: Blowing the Lid Off the God-Box: Opening Up to the Limitless Faith by Rev. Anne Robertson

Watch: Bruce Almighty (2003)

John Wesley Sermon: [“The Unity of The Divine Being”](#)

## WEEK 2: LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE GARDEN

Watch: Rev. Dr. Eliezer Valentín-Castañón, <http://tiny.cc/valentincastanonvideo>

Watch: Arrogance, <http://tiny.cc/arrogance>

Read: Putting our assignment of stewardship for creation in context, <http://tiny.cc/humanesociety>

Read: “Faith in Gods and in God,” by Richard Niebuhr, <http://tiny.cc/niebuhr>.

Read: John Wesley Sermon on “Original Sin”, <http://tiny.cc/originalsin>

Watch: Do the Right Thing (1989)

## WEEK 3: REMEMBERING OUR STORY

Watch: Rev. Dr. Bruce Birch, <http://tiny.cc/birchvideo>

Watch: “The Danger of a Single Story,” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <http://tiny.cc/7vhbdz>

Listen: Go Down Moses (Let My People Go), <http://tiny.cc/godownmoses>

Read: Chapter Four “Bondage, Exodus, Wilderness” from A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament, Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Peterson, <http://tiny.cc/theologicalintroduction>

Watch: Schindler’s List (1993)

Read: Wesley’s Sermon on “The Wilderness State”, <http://tiny.cc/wildernessstate>

## WEEK 4: EMBRACING GOD’S MANY NAMES

Watch: Rabbi Joshua Martin Siegel, <http://tiny.cc/siegelvideo>

Watch: Names of God, <http://tiny.cc/namesvideo>

Read: In the midst of the mess: Hagar and the God Who Sees by Amy R. Buckley, <http://tiny.cc/midstofmes>

Read: John Wesley Writings: Sermon “On The Trinity” – Cork, Ireland, 1775, <http://tiny.cc/tsermonontrinity>

## WEEK 5: VISIONING AND PROPHECYING

Watch: Rev. Dr. Marvin Mickle, <http://tiny.cc/mcmicklevideo>

Read: Where have all the prophet’s gone?, <http://tiny.cc/whereprophets>

Movie: Selma (2015)

John Wesley’s Writing: Sermon on the Mount, 12, <http://tiny.cc/sermononmount>

## Week 6:

Read: John Wesley’s [“New Creation”](#), <http://tiny.cc/thenewcreation>

Watch: Rev. Dr. Zina Jacque, <http://tiny.cc/jacquevideo>

Watch: [A Force More Powerful](#) (1999). <http://tiny.cc/forcepowerful>

Read: [“Seeing God in Each Other,”](#) ed. By Sheryl Kujawa Holbrook

Read: [“America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege and the Bridge to a New America.”](#) by Jim Wallis

## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL GROUND RULES

#### ***Respectful Communication Guidelines by Eric Law***

As a way to create a brave and safe space for faithful dialogue, please consider using the *RESPECTful Communication Guidelines* by Eric Law and the process of Mutual Invitation. These guidelines are written in a way for you to share with your group. If your group is larger than seven people, consider breaking people into smaller groups and provide time for sharing.

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E = use EMPATHETIC listening.

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY.

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

#### **Mutual Invitation**

Taken from *The Wolf Shall Dance With the Lamb* by Eric Law

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way: The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share.

Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. (As a matter of fact, it is best if it is NOT the person next to you.) After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

If you are not ready to share yet, say “I pass for now” and you will be invited to share later on. If you don’t want to say anything at all, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone’s sharing immediately (also known as crosstalk). There will be time to respond and to ask clarification questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

#### ***Grounding Virtues by Krista Tippett from On Being Project***

Taken from Krista Tippett’s *Grounding Virtues: What we Practice We Become* at

<http://tiny.cc/betterconversations>

#### **WORDS THAT MATTER**

We are starved for fresh language to approach each other. We need what Elizabeth Alexander calls “words that shimmer” – words with power that convey real truth, which cannot be captured in mere fact. Words have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others. Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster.

#### **HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality is a bridge to all the great virtues, but it is immediately accessible. You don’t have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality. But it’s more than an invitation. It is the creation of an inviting, trustworthy space – an atmosphere as much as a place. It shapes the experience to follow. It creates the intention,



the spirit, and the boundaries for what is possible. As creatures, it seems, we imagine a homogeneity in other groups that we know not to be there in our own. But new social realities are brought into being over time by a quality of relationship between unlikely combinations of people. When in doubt, practice hospitality.

#### HUMILITY

Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about getting small. It is about encouraging others to be big. It is not about debasing oneself but about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. This is the humility of the child. It is the humility in the spirituality of the scientist and the mystic – to be planted in what you know, while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come. The wisest people we’ve interviewed carry a humility that manifests as tenderness in a creative interplay with power.

#### PATIENCE

Like humility, patience is not to be mistaken for meekness and ineffectuality. It can be the fruit of a full-on reckoning with reality – a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view of time – seasonal and cyclical, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, time as a matter of deadlines. Human transformation takes time – longer than we want it to – but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our sense of our capacities and our hope for the world.

#### GENEROUS LISTENING

Listening is an everyday art and virtue, but it’s an art we have lost and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while others have their say. It is about presence as much as receiving; it is about connection more than observing. Real listening is powered by curiosity. It involves vulnerability – a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. It is never in “gotcha” mode. The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons one’s own best self and one’s own most generous words and questions.

#### ADVENTUROUS CIVILITY

The adventure of civility for our time can’t be a mere matter of politeness or niceness. Adventurous civility honors the difficulty of what we face and the complexity of what it means to be human. It doesn’t celebrate diversity by putting it up on a pedestal and ignoring its messiness and its depths. The intimate and civilizational questions that perplex and divide us will not be resolved quickly. Civility, in our world of change, is about creating new possibilities for living forward while being different and even continuing to hold profound disagreement.

A content outline for parts 2 and 3 is provided below. Download the full curriculum for Part 2 in December, to begin in January. Part 3 is designed to be a Lenten study.

## **PART 2: WHO ARE WE AS UNITED METHODISTS?**

Suggested start date: Week of Jan. 5, 2020

### **Week 1: Our Theology of Grace**

Grace pervades everything. As United Methodists, we share the conviction that grace “is the undeserved, unmerited and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. We celebrate prevenient grace, which precedes salvation; justifying grace, which illuminates God’s accepting and forgiving love; and sanctifying grace, which nurtures our growth in the love of God and our neighbor.

### **Week 2: Our Foundations (Connectional, Covenantal, Conciliar)**

United Methodists are defined by the Connection, we are bound together in policy and polity, mission and ministry – united and connected with one another, local churches, the annual conference and beyond – able to do infinitely more together than we ever could apart. United Methodist do not act in solitude, but discern and make decisions together, in council with one another, through holy conferencing. These decisions and actions are guided by our book of covenant, The Discipline, which we write and rewrite together every four years. We should not dip into the Discipline just to prove a point of view. It is a book to be valued and savored from cover to cover.

### **Week 3: Our Way of Understanding Scripture (Wesleyan Quadrilateral)**

Our theology is an expression of God’s presence in the world. Every person, in each generation, is called to explore anew God’s unfolding power and Gospel promise. To assist in this task, United Methodists call upon the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, trusting that our faith is revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, manifest in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture is the primary source of our doctrine. However, many issues before the church today demand the broadening of our preconceived notions of faith and require complex and nuanced discernment. How, for example, should the Levitical codes be applied to life in a modern context? What do we miss when we try to provide tidy theological answers to exquisitely complicated issues?

### **Week 4: Our Wesleyan Discipleship and The Means of Grace**

At the heart of Methodism is the uniting of vital piety and social holiness. We accomplish this by practicing the Rule of Discipleship with acts of personal acts of compassion and devotion, and communal acts of justice and worship. With these acts, we grow in our ability to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbors as ourselves. A vital part of our spiritual journey, we practice means of grace that include Bible study, prayer, fasting, healthy living, taking Communion, visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry, seeking justice, and working to end oppression, and more. In these practices, God works in and through us.

### **Week 5: Our Founder: John Wesley the Resister**

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, stood as a counter-cultural presence, daring to stand-up and confront the culture of his day. How did Wesley deal with slavery, the working poor, women in ministry and other issues facing the church? What principles informed his thinking? What relevance does Methodism’s founder have for the denomination today? Which of his lessons can impact our lives in significant ways?

### **Week 6: Our Unfinished Business, What Really Happened in 1968?**

When the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist churches united 51 years ago, the EUB leaders insisted on an integrated denomination. But many questions of race and justice remained unresolved. In what ways is racism United Methodism’s “original sin”? As the church faces new separations, what lessons does our approach to race have to teach us? How is the church “forever beginning?”

## **PART 3: WHO ARE WE AS PEOPLE OF THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE?**

Suggested start date: Week of Feb. 23, 2020 (Ash Wednesday is Feb. 26)

### **Week 1: Hope Born Out of History: The Cradle of Methodism**

In 1784, Methodists gathered in Baltimore at the Christmas Conference to create what would grow into one of the most diverse expressions of faith in modern Christendom. Its early circuit riders created a movement of scriptural and social holiness that transformed a continent. How do our spiritual roots shape us today? What should we embrace and what should be relegated to history? How does the phrase “what’s past is prologue,” apply to the Church today?

### **Week 2: Hope Born Out of History: Law and Grace**

Robert Strawbridge was a man who practiced the power of the Spirit in action. Bishop Francis Asbury was a person who gave all for his faith. Their conflict over the rules of the Book of Discipline and how we live out our doctrine define us still. What do our denomination’s historic conflicts over law and grace have to teach us today?

### **Week 3: Hope Born Out of History: Our Struggles**

Conflict centered on a Baltimore bishop who was a slave owner brought the denomination to schism. A dispute over the authority of bishops led to another schism. Methodists are “all-in” when it comes to matters of their faith, but they’re also known as a people of the big tent, inviting differences of opinion while being united in Christ. Racism and civil rights, war and peace, immigration reform and nationalism, the ordination of women, human sexuality are all issues over which people of good faith differ. How do we stay connected and how do we work in shared mission when we hold conflicting views on important issues?

### **Week 4: Hope Born Out of History: Telling the Whole Truth**

Too often we allow ourselves to be lulled into thinking that we are living in a post-racial world, where racism doesn’t shape our culture and our lives. Too often, we ignore the evils of racism, preferring instead to dwell in partial truths and spiritual platitudes. This tendency causes us to tame the calls to action from prophets like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. How is the church today being called to deep transformation? How do we combat the remnants of the sin of segregation? In the BWC, we can learn from many examples.

### **Week 5: Hope Born Out of History: Our Missional Impact**

Even in its darker moments, United Methodists shine as a light to the nations. We are missional. We embrace the vision that “transformed lives transform lives” and live out our call to make disciples for the transformation of the world with ministries like VIM, the UMW, UMCOR, Imagine No Malaria and more. Over the decades, the people of the BWC have built hospitals, universities, retirement communities, orphanages, camps and so much more. How does our mission define us? How do we honor God in our actions as a Church?

### **Week 6: Hope for Our Next Steps**

Drawing on the lessons from the entirety of the Who Are We? resource, the Baltimore-Washington Conference creates a vision for becoming a movement once again.

## AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

Beloved, many hands make light work. That could not be more true of this vision, which has now become reality. I am indebted to everyone who contributed to this study, whether that contribution was large or small. And, as we all know, once you begin listing persons, someone will inevitably be overlooked or omitted. If that is the case, please forgive me in advance.

I would like to thank each of the content presenters: the Revs. Eliezer Valentín-Castañón, Bruce Birch, Marvin McMickel and Zina Jacque, and Rabbi Joshua Martin Siegel.

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I cannot thank you enough. To God be the glory!  
*Bishop LaTrelle Easterling*