



ROAD TO HOLY DISCERNMENT

Doing God's will....finding common ground.

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Volume 8

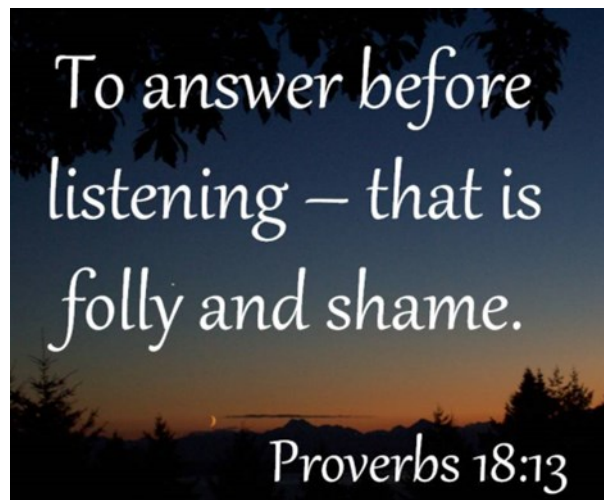


During the Lenten season, let us all be reminded of the meaning of discernment. As discussed in the Bible, discernment is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, and to make wise and spiritually sound decisions. Be *prayerful* about the decisions facing Bethany.

“⁴²Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, ⁴³for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.” John 12:42-43 During discernment, *search for God's will.*

Listen Without Judgement

How many times have you found yourself listening to someone and realize that you have actually stopped listening because you disagree with what the person is saying and have started to think about your reply? Unfortunately, this is normal human behavior. It is often very hard to truly listen to someone when they are saying things that do not match what you believe.



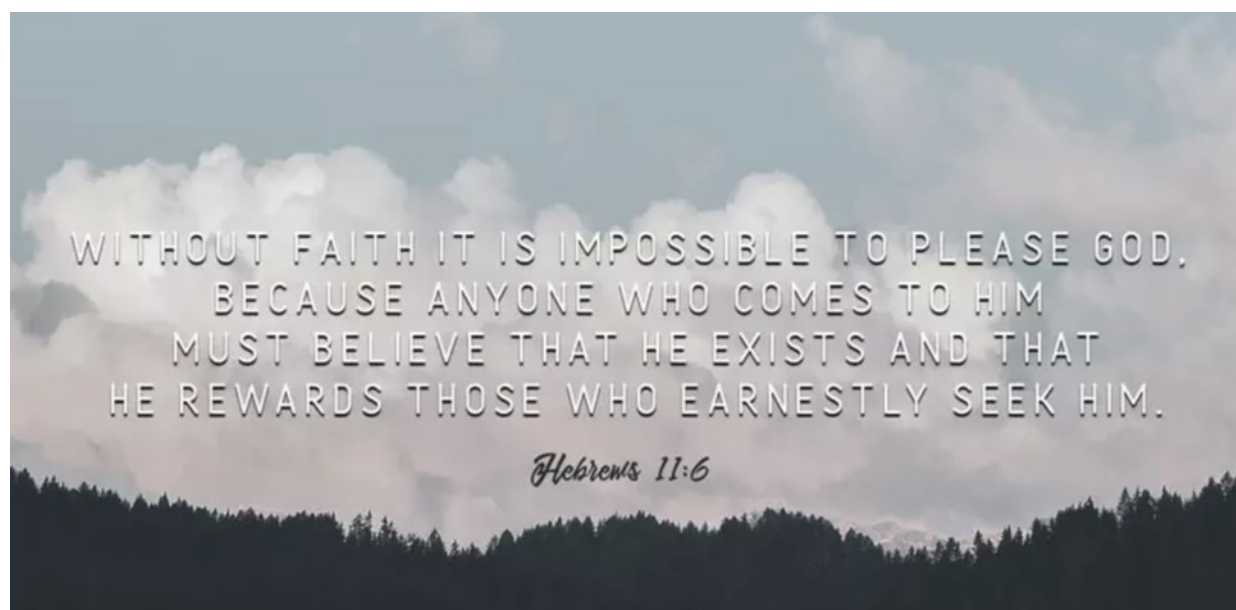
There are numerous differing opinions as to what is best for Bethany and numerous differing reasons for those opinions. These differences have created difficult times for everyone at Bethany. In order for Bethany to make it through these times, we must find ways to work and worship together as we have done in the past.

One of the ways to do this is through open and honest communication. We need to be able and willing to talk to each other and we must be willing to listen in order to understand and not judge. Understanding another person's beliefs and/or reasons for those beliefs does not mean that you agree with them, but it does provide an avenue to enable us to work and worship together in Christian love and fellowship. As the author John Steinbeck once said, *"If you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and almost always leads to love."*



Road To Holy Discernment: What We Believe (Introduction)

Lent is often described as a time of preparation and an opportunity to go deeper with God. The Lenten season is, therefore, a perfect time for us to examine the beliefs of the United Methodist Church, Methodism, and Bethany as we continue to discern where God is leading us as a congregation and as individuals. For this reason, the *Road To Holy Discernment* will **focus on our beliefs** during the 40 days of Lent through a series of “What We Believe” newsletters.



We will begin the “What We Believe” series by looking at the beliefs of the United Methodist Church.



United Methodist beliefs and how those beliefs are manifested are guided by several different items:

- Doctrinal Standards
- General Rules
- Theological Task
- Grace
- Social Principles

Each of these items are defined and described in the United Methodist Church 2016 Book of Discipline (BOD). An in-depth discussion of these items is beyond the scope of the newsletters so we will attempt to provide a “snapshot” of each item and what it means.

Following is a brief high-level summary of each of these items. A mid-level dive into these items will be provided in subsequent newsletters. Links to the detailed item descriptions will also be provided in the subsequent newsletters for those that want to delve deeper. All information provided below comes directly from the 2016 BOD or the UMC website.

Doctrinal Standards

The United Methodist Church identifies four documents as the "doctrinal standards" of the denomination: *The Articles of Religion*, *Confession of Faith*, John Wesley’s “Standard Sermons”, and John Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*.

The *Articles of Religion* and *Confession of Faith* provide the foundational framework for United Methodist doctrine. All United Methodists are expected to teach in accordance with the statements of these two documents.

The other two documents fill out some detail about more specific matters. John Wesley developed his set of "Standard Sermons" as sermons to be preached verbatim by those still learning Christian doctrine and how to preach. His *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* offers brief commentary on the New Testament.

General Rules

There are three “General Rules” summarized as: *1) Do No Harm, 2) Do Good, and 3) Attend upon all the Ordinances of God.*

The General Rules are Methodism's guidance about how to live as faithful disciples of Jesus, fulfilling the vows of baptism.

The General Rules are found in every edition of The Book of Discipline. They were developed by John Wesley in 1743 as guidelines for membership in the Methodist societies. The Rules are a simple and concise description of basic Christian practices, described by Wesley as "means of grace."

Theological Task

The “Theological Task” involves four items: Scripture (Holy Bible), tradition, personal experience, and reason.



Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.

The theological task, though related to the Church’s doctrinal expressions, serves a different function. Our doctrinal affirmations assist us in the discernment of Christian truth in ever-changing contexts. Our theological task includes the testing, renewal, elaboration, and application of our doctrinal perspective in carrying out our calling “to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.”

Grace

Grace pervades our understanding of Christian faith and life. By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as “prevenient grace,” continues in “justifying grace,” and is brought to fruition in “sanctifying grace.”

Social Principles

The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.

From the Social Principles Preamble: We affirm our unity in Jesus Christ while acknowledging differences in applying our faith in different cultural contexts as we live out the gospel. We stand united in declaring our faith that God's grace is available to all, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.