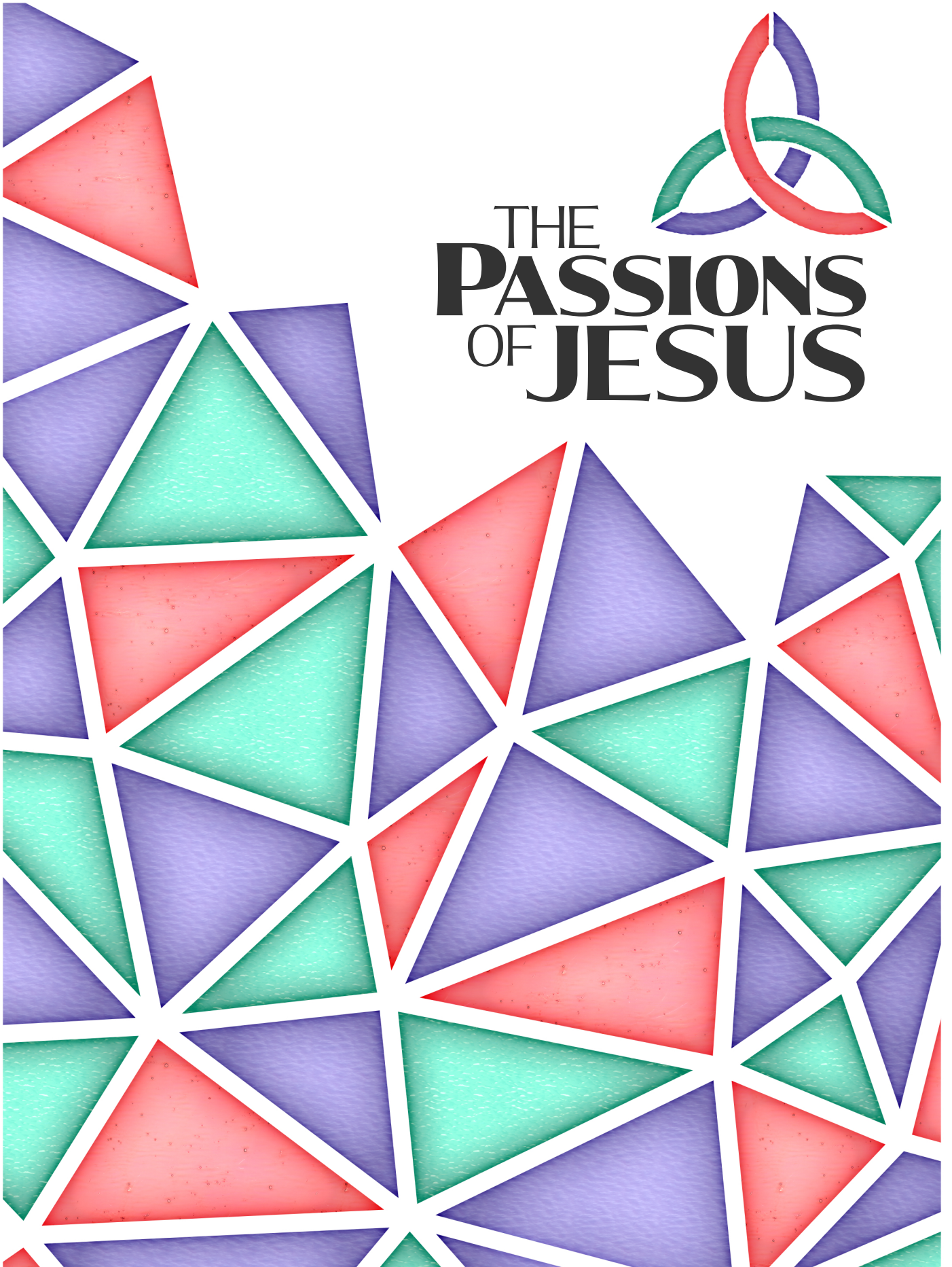




THE  
**PASSIONS**  
OF **JESUS**



# PREFACE

*Friends,*

*I pray as you travel through scripture, listen to and share your stories, pray for and with one another, that your lives may be transformed. I pray your heart dances with joy and enlightenment as the love of Jesus consumes your life in mighty and powerful ways.*

*Through this Lenten season, allow yourselves to wrestle with what this journey means to you, seeking how God is calling you to be the embodiment of Jesus in the world. As you do this, may you find yourselves resting in the true passion and compassion of Jesus, empowered to share this journey with others.*

*Thank you for this sacred walk together.*

*Shalom,  
Gloria*

## CREATIVE TEAM



STUDY CREATED BY  
Rev. Gloria Hughes



STUDY PRODUCED BY  
Melissa McGill



STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN BY:  
Havaleh Havelka

*This is a production of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.*



**Western North Carolina Conference**  
The United Methodist Church

# FACILITATOR NOTES

## STUDY MATERIALS

To facilitate *The Passions of Jesus*, you'll need the following materials:

- ▶ *The Passions of Jesus Small Group Study Guide*
- ▶ *The Passions of Jesus* videos available online for streaming or downloading
- ▶ Computer connected to a monitor or television to watch the video in the classroom or gathering space
- ▶ Internet access, if streaming the video online

## ACCESSING DIGITAL CONTENT

To access the digital content related to *The Passions of Jesus*, go to [wnccumc.org/passionsofjesus](http://wnccumc.org/passionsofjesus).

- ▶ Download the .zip file to save the video files to your computer/device. Once downloaded, you can view the videos through a video player on your device without needing internet access.
- ▶ Click the links to Vimeo or YouTube to stream the videos online.
- ▶ Click the Spotify link to listen to a carefully curated playlist of songs.
- ▶ Click the Means of Grace podcast link (or go to [wnccumc.org/meansofgrace](http://wnccumc.org/meansofgrace)) to listen to longer, fuller versions of the conversations for each session. We wanted to keep the videos to 8-10 minutes for this study, but our guests had so much wisdom to share! Listen to the podcasts to hear the 15- to 30-minute conversations in full.

## PREPARATION

To prepare for each session of *The Passions of Jesus*:

- ▶ Review the appropriate session in this study guide.
- ▶ Preview the session video.
- ▶ Make notes about anything that stands out to you in the guide or video.
- ▶ Set up the classroom or gathering space, including queuing up the video.
- ▶ Pray for yourself and your participants.

## SESSION OUTLINE

Each session of *The Passions of Jesus* follows the same one-hour outline:

Gathering (5 minutes): Invite participants to gather and pick up any available drinks or snacks before officially beginning the session.

Introduction (2 minutes): Introduce the session and ask participants to share about their experiences with the call to action from the previous session.

Opening Prayer (1 minute): A prayer is printed; however, feel free to craft your own.

Scripture readings (2 minutes): Invite participants to read aloud the printed scriptures.

Watch Video (7-13 minutes): Each video lasts approximately 7-13 minutes.

Discuss (35 minutes): The bulk of your time together will be spent in conversation. This facilitator guide includes prompts for you to utilize during this discussion. Depending upon your participants and their willingness to share, you might need to select only a few questions from the list of discussion prompts.

Call to Action (2 minutes): This is an invitation to respond to what has been discussed in each session by putting it into practice.

Closing Prayer (3 minutes): A prayer is printed; however, feel free to craft your own or ask a participant to pray.

Going Deeper: This extra, optional section is designed for groups who meet for a longer period of time or individuals who want to reflect further on the topics explored in this study.

## FACILITATION TIPS

The definition of a facilitator is not an expert; rather, it is someone who provides assistance or guidance to bring about an outcome. The outcome we are hoping for with this small group study is simply that participants engage in conversation. Ideally, that conversation will lead them to more freely receive Jesus' passion, share their passion for Jesus, and embody Jesus' passion for others. Your role as the facilitator is to set the stage for discussion and to encourage participation. The following tips will help you in accomplishing this:

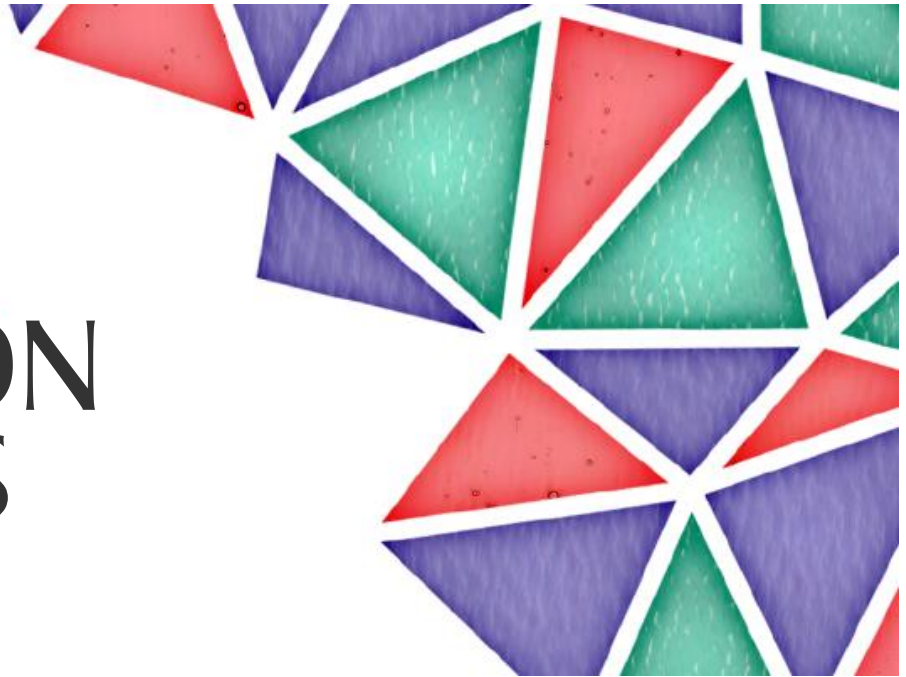
- ▶ Take time to prepare appropriately: No one expects you to have all of the answers, but if you commit to preparing yourself for each session, the participants will notice. The more interested you are, the more they will be, too.
- ▶ Get people talking: Offer the discussion prompts, then encourage participants to keep the conversation rolling. If people don't respond to your prompts right away, utilize the ten-second rule (wait ten seconds after asking a question before reframing or asking another).
- ▶ Encourage participation: Provide positive reinforcement through verbal and nonverbal active listening techniques like maintaining eye contact, nodding your head, smiling or providing verbal feedback to participant contributions.
- ▶ There are no wrong answers: The questions included in this study are prompts, not quiz questions. Differences of opinions are welcome as long as participants share in a respectful manner.
- ▶ Keep the group on task and on time: Allow the conversation to flow naturally but reign it in if it goes too far off course. If needed, assign someone as the timekeeper to hold everyone accountable to the schedule.



SESSION ONE

# JESUS' PASSION FOR US

WORTH DYING FOR



FEATURING:



Dr. Samuel Moore



Rev. Kyle Sigmon

**We have to ask  
ourselves: What is  
worth **living** for? And,  
what is worth **dying** for?**

*Rev. Gloria Hughes*

### **Gathering** (5 minutes)

#### **Introduction** (2 minutes)

Welcome to this study on *The Passions of Jesus*. Throughout six sessions, we'll look at Jesus' passion for us and how we receive that love, our passion for Jesus and how we share that faith with others, and Jesus' passion for others and how we embody that compassion for our neighbors. Today, we'll start with Jesus' passion for us.

#### **Opening prayer** (1 minute)

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today. Help us to listen to what you have to say to us through this study, the videos we'll watch and the discussion we will share together. We believe that you are here among us and we look forward to how you will touch our hearts and move us to action. Amen.

#### **Scripture readings:** (2 minutes)

- ▶ John 15:12-17 (NRSV): "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."
- ▶ Romans 5:1-8 (NRSV): Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

#### **Watch video** (7 minutes)

**This year for Lent,  
besides giving up the  
chocolate and the  
things that we like,  
look for ways that we  
can be vulnerable.**

**Look for ways that  
we can engage in  
the suffering of  
others and imitate  
Jesus where he  
redeemed suffering.**

**We can be agents of  
redemption.**

*Dr. Samuel Moore*

#### **Discuss: (35 minutes)**

- ▶ What stood out to you in this video?
- ▶ In the video, Gloria shares a definition of passion that involves suffering. Throughout this study, we'll explore a variety of definitions of passion — suffering, compassion and joy, to name a few. How do you define passion?
- ▶ Sam shares some historical examples of passions that people were willing to die for. He mentions the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement as causes that people were passionate about and were willing to suffer or even die for. These were also examples of times when people came alongside the oppressed to help alleviate their suffering. What suffering has taken place in your community and in the world? When has justice been denied? Who has helped to alleviate that suffering?
- ▶ When we look around the world and even right in our communities and families, we see so much pain and suffering, often at the hands of fellow humans. As Kyle says, loving others takes risk. It's a courageous and risky thing to do. Who needs our love? Who do you find difficult to love?
- ▶ Kyle talks about God's prevenient grace that comes after us wherever we are. God's grace is freely gifted to us, without merit. When have you felt the love and grace of God when perhaps you didn't feel like you deserved it? When have you shown love to someone when it was difficult to do so?
- ▶ What do you feel is worth dying for? What is worth living for? What risk might God be asking you to take?

#### **Call to action (2 minutes)**

Visit a local history museum, watch a documentary about the Holocaust, Civil Rights or other stories of suffering in our history, or spend some time with a relative or neighbor who has lived throughout times of suffering to learn more about their story.

#### **Closing prayer (3 minutes)**

Would anyone like to volunteer to close us in prayer?

What praises or concerns should we lift up in prayer this week?

Creator of the universe who cares even for, especially for, us. Thank you for coming to earth to live with us and die for us. Amen.

## GOING DEEPER

# A WESLEYAN THEOLOGY OF GRACE

Our founder, John Wesley, preached about three types of grace. “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.’”<sup>1</sup>

### **PREVENIENT GRACE:**

**God’s passion for us before we’re aware.**

Prevenient comes from the Latin root for “to precede.” It is the grace that comes before we are conscious of God or God’s grace. This grace prepares our hearts and minds to receive the gospel and respond in faith. By naming this grace, we acknowledge that grace is not something we earn. Rather, it is a gift that we receive.

### **JUSTIFYING GRACE:**

**God’s passion for us to accept our Savior and the gift of forgiveness.**

Justification is the pardon or forgiveness of our sins. It comes with the confidence that Jesus died for us. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, “You are saved by God’s grace because of your faith. This salvation is God’s gift.”

### **SANCTIFYING GRACE:**

**God’s passion for us to love creation as Jesus loved us.**

To sanctify is to make holy. This grace molds us into our best selves, where we are most Christlike, filling us with love for God and our neighbors.

*When have you felt these graces in your life?*

*Can you identify situations or times in your life when the Holy Spirit moved in you with sanctifying grace to speak through you or mold your heart?*

<sup>1</sup> United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (2016) ¶102



SESSION TWO

# RECEIVING JESUS' PASSION FOR US

THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE



FEATURING:



Rev. Michael Carr



Rev. Stacey Lundy



Rev. Sally Queen

**I don't have to transform  
people's suffering.  
That's not my job.**

**My job is to be  
with them.**

*Rev. Stacey Lundy*

### **Gathering** (5 minutes)

#### **Introduction** (2 minutes)

In our last session, we discussed Jesus' passion for us — that he died for us and for the kingdom of God. We were challenged to respond by spending time learning about historical suffering in our communities.

Who would like to share about how that went?

In this session, we'll look at how we experience that passion through the ministry of presence.

#### **Opening prayer** (1 minute)

To the One who walks with us in times of struggle and pain, thank you for being present with us — whatever comes our way. Amen.

#### **Scripture readings:** (2 minutes)

- ▶ John 14:15-20 (NRSV): "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."
- ▶ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NRSV): Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

#### **Watch video** (13 minutes)

#### **Discuss:** (35 minutes)

- ▶ What stood out to you in this video?
- ▶ Mike identifies with Jesus's mother Mary at the cross in a way he hadn't before experiencing the death of his daughter Hannah Faith. He understands Mary in a new way, and this adds a deeply personal lens to his reading of that text. Have you ever had a similar experience with scripture? Do you relate to any Biblical characters in a way that helps you to see the scripture through a personal lens?

- ▶ Sally shares about gripping the bar during her treatments. Sometimes she gripped the bar tightly, but sometimes she was able to loosen that grip and let go of the fear, knowing that God was there. When have you gripped the bar tightly? Who or what helped you to loosen your grip and let go of fear?
- ▶ Stacey's story takes us through Holy Week — from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. We often skip over Holy Saturday. We skip from Jesus' death to his resurrection, but Holy Saturday — this day of waiting, of grieving, of uncertainty — is vital to remember in our times of suffering. Sometimes, we must wait, uncertain of what is to come. In the church, we call that time holy because we have faith that new life is waiting for us, no matter how long the waiting or how great the suffering. When have you experienced a Holy Saturday?
- ▶ Each of the stories in the video had elements of the divine. Mike shares about feeling God's strength as others laid hands on him. Sally shares about learning to let other people care for her and feeling God's compassion through their care. When have you received Jesus' passion, through a divine moment or through the love and compassion of others?
- ▶ Stacey shares that in her most profound moments of pain, her desire was not to have the pain disappear, but for someone to simply hold her hand and be present with her. When has someone been present for you?
- ▶ One of the ways we are invited to be Christlike is to be present for others. When have you been there for someone else? Is it difficult to simply be present and allow the Holy Spirit to fill the space?
- ▶ In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes that "pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains." How do you reconcile a good God with bad things that happen to people we dearly love?

#### **Call to action** (2 minutes)

Are you walking a journey right now that would benefit from someone walking with you? Be vulnerable and reach out to someone you trust to walk with you. Do you know someone who is taking a tough journey right now? Reach out to them and offer the ministry of your presence.

#### **Closing prayer** (3 minutes)

Would anyone like to volunteer to close us in prayer?

What praises or concerns should we lift up in prayer this week?

El Roi, God who sees me, who sees us. For your gracious and abiding presence with us, we give you thanks. For the people who have been an extension of your presence, we thank you. Empower us to be your true incarnation in every way possible as we seek to be bearers of your love. Amen.

## GOING DEEPER

# SHIVA

When someone dies, those in the Jewish faith observe shiva. Shiva takes place for the first seven days of mourning. For these seven days, mourners sit shiva, remaining at home (or the home of the deceased), conducting three daily prayer services and welcoming visitors who call on them to show their respect and support.

According to Jewish law, these visitors who make a shiva call must enter the home quietly, sit near to the mourner and remain still and silent until the mourner addresses them. This gives the mourner the power of choice. Do they want to sit in silence with fellow loved ones? Reach out for a hand to hold? Share their grief in conversation? Reminisce about happy memories?

We, too, can adopt this ministry of presence with our friends, family and neighbors. We don't presume to know what a struggling friend needs, but we can show up and be that silent strength, that hand to hold, that friend to talk with.

*When has someone practiced this ministry of presence for you, or when have you wished someone would have done so?*

SESSION THREE

# OUR PASSION FOR JESUS

FEARLESS & UNINHIBITED



FEATURING:



Rev. Susan Heafner-Heun



Rev. Chris Hughes



Rev. Susan Suarez-Webster



**Courage is not the  
opposite of fear.**

**I think it would  
be passion.**

*Rev. Chris Hughes*

### **Gathering** (5 minutes)

#### **Introduction** (2 minutes)

In our last session, we discussed how we experience Jesus' passion for us and were challenged to engage in the ministry of presence with someone else.

Who would like to share about how that went?

In this session, we will look at our passion for Jesus.

#### **Opening prayer** (1 minute)

God almighty, El Shaddai, you love us so deeply. Help us today to see ways in which we can fearlessly and uninhibitedly reflect that love back to you. Amen.

#### **Scripture reading:** (2 minutes)

- ▶ Luke 7:36-50 (NRSV): One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him — that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak."

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

#### **Watch video** (11 minutes)

### **Discuss:** (35 minutes)

- ▶ What stood out to you in this video?
- ▶ Susan Heafner-Heun retells the story of the woman anointing Jesus' feet and talks about the scent lingering and those who experienced it maybe remembering that moment every time they smelled the same fragrance. What scent memories do you have? What is the scent and what comes to mind?
- ▶ Susan Suarez-Webster shared her story of calling when she was living in Mexico and learning the Spanish language. Few of us are called into professional ministry, but God gifts us all with passions and gifts for a particular calling. What calling has God laid on your life? When did you hear the call, and how?
- ▶ Chris grew up in an environment where people freely shared their stories (sometimes we call this testimony or witnessing) and encouraged others to do the same. He called it public displays of affection (PDA) for Jesus. Has this been your experience in worship and in your faith communities (past or present)? If so, how do you think that community environment was cultivated? If not, can you identify the barriers or the reasons why uninhibited PDA for Jesus was not allowed (officially or unofficially)?
- ▶ For some people in some situations, that fearless freedom looks like exuberant joy. For others, it looks like reverent stillness. Who can recount a time when you've felt an undeniable passion for Jesus? Was it in a worship experience, in the outdoors, in a community of people? Where were you and what was going on?
- ▶ If you could look at your life objectively, would you say that others can see clearly the passion of Jesus in you? Why or why not? Could they name your faith as quickly as they can name your favorite musician or the sports team you follow?

### **Call to action** (2 minutes)

Consider keeping a journal to remind yourself of all the moments when you felt the Holy Spirit — through peace, through joy, in your heart, in your mind, through your body.

### **Closing prayer** (3 minutes)

Would anyone like to volunteer to close us in prayer?

What praises or concerns should we lift up in prayer this week?

Gracious God, your passion for us is extravagantly generous. Help us to let go of our inhibitions and fear of what others might think, to live our lives in fearless, passionate, service to you in every way possible. Help us allow our love for you to be visible in the ways we speak to, treat, care for and love one another. Amen.

## GOING DEEPER

# WESLEYAN MEANS OF GRACE

In the video, Chris talked about our passion for Jesus and how it is our way of “reflecting [Jesus’] passion back to him.” One way that we reflect that passion is through means of grace.

In a previous *Going Deeper*, we looked at a Wesleyan theology of grace, including prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. It is through means of grace, that we engage in the experience of those graces. What Wesley called means of grace, many call spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines. By instead calling these practices “means of grace,” we acknowledge that we do these things not in arrogance or ego, but in response to a grace freely given to us.

Wesley identified two categories of means of grace: Works of piety and works of mercy. In each of these categories, there are individual and communal practices. A sampling of these practices was shared in a 2014 post on [umc.org](https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace) titled *The Wesleyan Means of Grace*:<sup>2</sup>

### WORKS OF PIETY

**Individual Practices:** reading, meditating and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living and sharing our faith with others

**Communal Practices:** regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another) and Bible study

### WORKS OF MERCY

**Individual Practices:** doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry and giving generously to the needs of others

**Communal Practices:** seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (for instance Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery) and addressing the needs of the poor

*In which means of grace do you regularly engage?*

*Are there means of grace you wish you engaged in more frequently? What’s stopping you?*

*Are there any means of grace listed here that you hadn’t thought of before?*

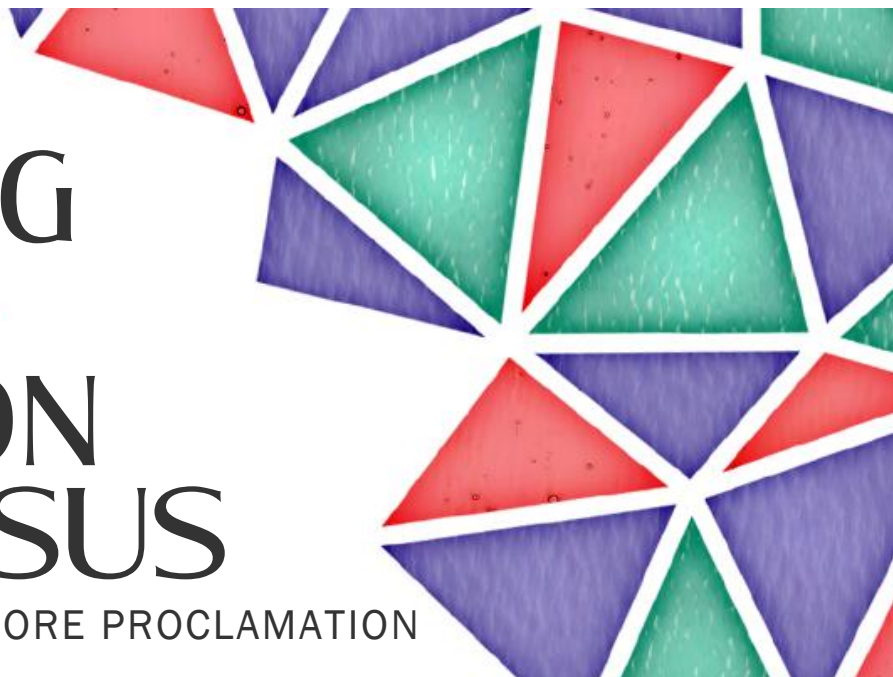
*Do you engage in a practice you consider of means of grace, but isn’t listed here?*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>

SESSION FOUR

# SHARING YOUR PASSION FOR JESUS

DEMONSTRATION BEFORE PROCLAMATION



FEATURING:



Rev. Ben Gatton



Dr. Stephanie Moore Hand



Rev. Josh Kurtz

I find that, especially in our day and age today, people see oftentimes a glimpse of the Word becoming flesh not through words but through actions, through demonstration before proclamation.

*Rev. Josh Kurtz*

### **Gathering** (5 minutes)

#### **Introduction** (2 minutes)

In our last session, we heard about the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and talked about fearlessly exhibiting a similar passion for Jesus. We were encouraged to keep a journal of moments when we felt the Holy Spirit moving in us and around us.

Who would like to share about how that went?

Today, we'll dive deeper into what it looks like to share our passion for Jesus' with others.

#### **Opening prayer** (1 minute)

Thank you, Lord, for this time together. We are thankful for you and thankful for one another. Help us to listen for what you have to say to us in our time together today. Amen.

#### **Scripture readings:** (2 minutes)

- ▶ Matthew 5:14-16 (NRSV): "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."
- ▶ Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV): Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

#### **Watch video** (12 minutes)

#### **Discuss:** (35 minutes)

- ▶ What stood out to you in this video?
- ▶ Josh shares that he first felt the love of Jesus through his family and his church. Stephanie shares about the power of corporate singing and individual prayer. Ben talks about finding God outside of the church and through the people he found there. These are only several stories of encountering Jesus. When did Jesus become real for you?



- ▶ Stephanie begins many days with the prayer, “Lord, give me your divine appointment today.” In the video, she shares about how God places people in her path and that the Holy Spirit gives her the words she needs in the moment. When has God placed someone in your path, and did you respond? When has the Holy Spirit given you words to speak?
- ▶ Josh shares a quote from *The Message*, “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood,” to emphasize that God is already present, wherever we go. He goes on to say that “When you show up, God shows off.” When have you shown up and God showed off? When have you gone somewhere you didn’t expect to find God, but found that God was already there?
- ▶ Ben shares that he grew up in a tradition that put a lot of pressure on evangelism that required memorization and recitation, but he finds that the power of evangelism is found in simply telling our stories. When have you shared with others your stories of faith? If you have, how did it go? If you haven’t, why not?
- ▶ Ben says that “The soil of discipleship is in relationships.” If you were raised in the church, you can probably name people who helped to form your faith. If you came to faith as an adult, maybe you can name someone who took time to get to know you and eventually, through their invitation or your curiosity, brought you to faith. Or maybe you’ve encountered people who taught you about Jesus or brought you closer to Jesus, even if they didn’t know it or weren’t believers themselves. What are the relationships that helped to shape your passion for Jesus?

#### **Call to action** (2 minutes)

Practice sharing your faith story with someone else. Pray and seek discernment for who God is leading you toward. Maybe it’s a lengthy, deep conversation with a best friend that you grew up with but never really talked about your faith in a meaningful way. Or, maybe it’s a brief encounter with a stranger you meet on the bus or in the check-out line. Whatever the circumstance, whomever you choose, share about your passion for Jesus.

#### **Closing prayer** (3 minutes)

Would anyone like to volunteer to close us in prayer?

What praises or concerns should we lift up in prayer this week?

Lord, we love you so much and desperately want to share that love, to share you, with the world. Grant us your divine appointment. Help us to demonstrate our love for you and love for others in such a way that those around us desire to get to know you, too. Amen.

## GOING DEEPER

# LEARNING TO TALK TO STRANGERS

The first step in any relationship is meeting someone and getting to know them. It starts with conversation. In today's society, though, we don't regularly take steps outside of our comfort zones. Oftentimes, we don't even know the names of our neighbors. So, how do you talk to strangers?

Kio Stark offers the following advice in her book, *When Strangers Meet*, and TED talk, *Why You Should Talk to Strangers*: "The guiding principle of these expeditions is respect for others, and every explorer should pay careful attention to their own conduct. ... Be polite, keep a bit of extra physical distance, and if people aren't giving you signals that they're open to interaction, don't push it."<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, she offers these steps for overcoming your fear of talking to strangers:

**1. Watch and learn:** Spend time in a public place where you're not likely to encounter people you know. Sit still and be fully present. (No devices or notifications!) Where are you? What kinds of people are here? Why are they here? What do they look like? How do they interact with one another? What assumptions did you bring with you? How were those assumptions solidified or challenged?

**2. Say hello:** Take a walk somewhere you're sure to encounter lots of people. Walk slowly. Say hello to every person you pass. Yes, everyone. Try to make eye contact. Throw in simple acknowledgements like, "Cute dog," "Nice shoes," or "It's cold today!" Since you're speaking to everyone, you probably won't cause discomfort for anyone else by singling them out. How do the people respond?

**3. Get lost:** Have paper and a pen ready (and tuck your phone away), then ask someone for directions. If they give you directions, ask them to draw a map. Were they happy or hesitant to help you? Is there anything about your approach to the conversation that might have affected their willingness to help?

**4. Ask a question:** People will generally talk if you give them a chance to. Don't underestimate the number of people in the world who just want someone to listen. Get out your phone and ask a stranger if you can ask them a question on camera. Ask a question that delves deeper than small talk. The author's favorite is "What are you afraid of?" Some people respond with simple answers like spiders, but most others will tell you about their heart-felt fears of loneliness, failure or loss. Your job is only to listen. Don't interrupt. Allow them to fill the silence.

*What experiences — positive or negative — have you had in talking with strangers?*

<sup>3</sup> <https://ideas.ted.com/how-to-talk-to-strangers/>

SESSION FIVE

# JESUS' PASSION FOR OTHERS

REVEALING THE CHARACTER OF GOD



FEATURING:



Rev. Susan Heafner-Heun



Rev. Joel Simpson

**Everybody has a  
story and all of those  
stories reveal the  
character of God.**

*Rev. Susan Heafner-Heun*

**Gathering (5 minutes)**

**Introduction (2 minutes)**

In our last session, we discussed ways that we share about Jesus' passion for us and were challenged to share that faith with someone else.

Who would like to share about how that went?

Today, we'll look at Jesus' passion for others.

**Opening prayer (1 minute)**

God, we see your love of people throughout the Bible. Thank you for loving us, too. Help us to love like you do. Amen.

**Scripture reading: (2 minutes)**

- ▶ Luke 8:40-56 (NRSV): Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying.

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer." When Jesus heard this, he replied, "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved." When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother. They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, "Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

- ▶ Additional stories discussed in the video, for your reference:
  - Jesus and the woman of Samaria, John 4:1-42
  - Jesus cleanses ten lepers, Luke 17:11-19
  - Jesus heals a blind beggar near Jericho, Luke 18: 35-43

**Watch video** (12 minutes)

**Discuss:** (35 minutes)

- ▶ What stood out to you in this video?
- ▶ Susan asks why the scripture authors decided to include the story of the woman who touched Jesus' garment. Why do you think the story was included?
- ▶ As you reflect on this story, when have you been the woman who risks everything to fight through the crowd for something you believe in? When have you been the crowd, worried about yourself? When have you been like Jesus and welcomed a "holy interruption," as Joel put it?
- ▶ Susan shares about the woman at the well and that she took a risk by sharing her story with Jesus. She says that storytelling is powerful and that everyone has a story to tell. When have you risked sharing your story? When has someone risked sharing their story with you?
- ▶ Joel shares about the blind beggar. Jesus doesn't assume that the blind man wants to see. He asks, "What do you want?" Sometimes we make assumptions about what someone else wants or needs. When have you done this? What does it mean that Jesus didn't?
- ▶ Joel also shares about Jesus healing the ten lepers and that only one shows gratitude. Jesus wasn't concerned with credit or thanks; he wanted to fulfill his calling and do what God called him to do. When have you showed compassion for someone without expecting any thanks? Have you ever been shown compassion and, for one reason or another, did not or could not show gratitude? How did it feel?

**Call to action** (2 minutes)

Pay attention to the holy interruptions God might be placing in your path. How do you respond to these interruptions?

**Closing prayer** (3 minutes)

Would anyone like to volunteer to close us in prayer?

What praises or concerns should we lift up in prayer this week?

Author of the universe, thank you for inviting us to be part of your epic story. Thank you, especially, for inviting us to be your hands and feet, embodying your love in this world that experiences so much pain. It is an honor and a privilege. Help us not to take it, or you, for granted. Amen.



## GOING DEEPER

# READING SCRIPTURE WITH WONDER

Children approach the world with awe and wonder. Everything is new. Cartoon monsters are scary. The Tooth Fairy is real. For babies, peek-a-boo is both terrifying and delightful. So, what do you think Jesus meant when he said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”? (Matthew 18:3-4 NRSV)

One possibility is that Jesus is inviting us to approach God’s story with the awe and wonder and excitement of a child. We are invited into God’s story when we read scripture. If we believe that our stories are part of God’s story, too, then we can connect with the Bible in a way that goes beyond intrigue or even inspiration. In scripture, we can find connections to our stories and ourselves.

In the video, Joel, Susan and Gloria don’t just read the Bible stories; they wonder about them. They imagine what the people might have been thinking or feeling. They use their senses to imagine what the setting might have looked, sounded, smelled, felt or even tasted like. Bringing this sense of wonder to scripture helps us experience the stories anew, even if we’ve read them hundreds of times.

*Do you ever read scripture with wonder? How does it affect the way you see the stories? How does it affect the way to see the very nature of God?*

*What does the Bible tell us about the heart of God?*

*What do you think it means to “become like children”?*

SESSION SIX

# EMBODYING JESUS' PASSION FOR OTHERS

CULTIVATING AN IMAGO DEI CONSCIOUSNESS



FEATURING:



Rev. Ben Carson



Rev. Karen Doucette

# God loves things by becoming them.

*Fr. Richard Rohr*

## **Gathering** (5 minutes)

### **Introduction** (2 minutes)

In our last session, we looked at Jesus' passion for others as evidenced in scripture about the woman who touches the hem of Jesus' garment, the woman at the well and the blind beggar. We were encouraged to pay attention to any holy interruptions that came our way.

Who would like to share about how that went?

As we wrap up this study on Jesus' passions, today we look at how we act as Christ's hands and feet, embodying Jesus' passion for others.

### **Opening prayer** (1 minute)

For all you've done, Lord, thank you. For all you will do, thank you. For who you are, thank you. For who you call us to be, thank you. Amen.

### **Scripture reading:** (2 minutes)

- ▶ Matthew 25:34-40 (NRSV): "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'- ▶ Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV): Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

### **Watch video** (8 minutes)

### Discuss: (35 minutes)

- ▶ What stood out to you in this video?
- ▶ In the video, Karen says that serving others is an opportunity; It's something we "get to do" or "say yes" to. This invitation into ministry with God is an honor that is freely given to all of us. We get to say yes to Jesus. We get to be in community with others. How might that change your perception of faith and ministry, to see it as something you "get to" do?
- ▶ As Ben says, we are invited to see Christ in all people and all things. *Imago dei* is Latin for "image of God." To cultivate an *imago dei* consciousness, we need to remember that we are all — each of us, all of us — made in the image of God and practice living like we really believe that to be true. When have you recognized the image of God in someone else?
- ▶ In our last session, Susan talked about owning our stories with compassion. Do you see your own story with compassion? When have you recognized the image of God in yourself?
- ▶ How have you been called to be the hands and feet of Jesus, embodying his passion for others?
- ▶ If your church uses the *Service of Word and Table* from the *United Methodist Hymnal*, you might recognize this part of that communion liturgy: "By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world." What did you hear? How does this relate to our study of *The Passions of Jesus*?
- ▶ What is something you will take with you from this study?

### Call to action (2 minutes)

Attend Holy Week services. Don't skip straight to Easter. Be present for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, too. If your church isn't hosting worship services for these holy days, look for opportunities in your community or make space for personal worship each day.

### Closing prayer (3 minutes)

Would anyone like to volunteer to close us in prayer?

What praises or concerns should we lift up in prayer this week?

Emmanuel, God with us, thank you for this time we've shared, getting to know you better. Help us to accept your passion for us, reflect that love back to you and embody your compassion for others. May we take what we've learned here together and live it out in our daily lives. Amen.

## GOING DEEPER

# LOVE FEASTS

John Wesley wrote in his diary about sharing in a Love Feast with Moravians in Savannah, Georgia in 1737. As the Methodist movement came to North America, Love Feasts became an important part of our early churches.

A Love Feast or Agape Meal is similar to Holy Communion in that both have food and drink elements and mimic a meal between Jesus and his disciples. A Love Feast is distinct from Holy Communion, though, in that it may be conducted by any Christian — clergy or lay person — and it does not represent the Last Supper or the gift of Jesus' body and blood. A Love Feast should include scripture, prayer and the sharing of sweet bread and water, tea or coffee. Participants should join in a circle then serve the sweet rolls and beverage around the circle.

The focal point of most Love Feasts is the sharing about what God has done or is doing in the participants' lives. This can take the form of personal witness, storytelling, prayer, song, poetry or any other way the Holy Spirit leads.

*Invite an ordained elder to administer Holy Communion for your small group or plan a Love Feast, which may be led by anyone in your group.*



# THANK YOU



*Thank you to Picnic Table Productions for providing videography and editing services. Learn more about them at [picnictablevideo.com](http://picnictablevideo.com).*

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*Thank you to Ache Branding and Design for our logo and graphic elements. Learn more about them at [www.ache.design](http://www.ache.design).*

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*Thank you to our friends at Community Matters Café for welcoming us to film at their location. Community Matters Café is a ministry of Charlotte Rescue Mission. As explained on their website, it is a “full-service restaurant and coffee shop serving the community while providing professional life skills for both Rebound and Dove’s Nest graduates.” Learn more at [communitymatterscafe.com](http://communitymatterscafe.com) and [charlotterescuemission.org](http://charlotterescuemission.org).*