

# **CROWDSOURCING**

## **GROWTH GROUP STUDY GUIDE**





August 6, 2023

## Session 1 | How to be a Christian that attracts pre and post-Christian friends.

***Before you begin*** this Growth Group session, watch the following video summary. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcNi\\_omekhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcNi_omekhA)



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

If you go looking, you will find that there are several different definitions being used for the terms pre-Christian and post-Christian. For the purposes of this sermon study, the definitions being used are:

- Pre-Christian: a person who has not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Their eyes are fixed on the temporary things of this world.
- Post-Christian: A person that at one point in their life claimed to be a Christian but has since renounced or deconstructed their faith and is no longer living for the Lord.

*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.*

Colossians 4:5

When pondering the idea of being “a Christian that attracts pre and post-Christian (i.e., non-Christian) friends”, the response that comes to mind is one that our Pastor has said on multiple occasions: “Be the church.” So, what does it mean to “Be the church”? It can mean being there when they need help or comfort. It can mean loving them when they are being unlovable or being generous with your time and resources when they are in need. It can also mean being honest with them about the choices they make. (That does NOT mean slapping them with Bible verses. “Conversion by Concussion” is not an effective way to make friends or to lead them to Christ.) It can and should mean sharing in their times of joy and celebrating the significant moments in their lives. And it should mean regularly lifting them up in prayer.

*When you look back upon your interactions with others, do you see yourself living the Marks of a Disciple?*

Does this list of ways to be a friend, to “Be the church”, sound familiar? It should. Being the church is as simple, and as complex, as living the Marks of a Disciple in our daily lives and in our interactions with others. As a disciple, we are to support the church, our friends and family, and everyone we meet with our prayers, presence, gifts, witness, and service. When you look back upon your interactions with others, do you see yourself living the Marks of a Disciple? If you do, then you are on the path to being a “Christian that attracts pre and post Christian friends.”

**Scripture:** Colossians 4:2-6, Luke 14:15-24

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

## Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

## Questions from the Bible:

1. How does the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) relate to the idea of being a Christian that attracts pre and post Christian friends?
2. In this week's Colossians passage, Paul instructs the Colossian Christians to pray. What does he ask them to pray for?
3. In Colossians 4:5, what does it mean to be "wise in the way you act toward outsiders"?
4. In Colossians 4:6, Paul instructs the Colossians to "*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.*" What does Paul mean by "*full of grace*" and by "*seasoned with salt*"?
5. Taken together, what is Paul instructing us to do in Colossians 4:5-6?

6. While at a banquet hosted by a Pharisee, Jesus witnessed how the guests pick places of honor at the table. His instruction to those assembled is found in Luke 14:10: “*But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.*” What character virtue do you think Jesus is promoting? Why is this important to Jesus? How should this character trait impact our relationships?
  
7. Read Romans 14:19-20. What, if anything, do you think this verse has to say to us today about our interactions with pre and post-Christian friends?

### Questions for Application:

1. In your experience, have you wrestled with the apparent conflict of being yoked with unbelievers and leading them to Christ?
  
2. If you can, describe a situation where you had to choose between being a friend and avoiding a situation that made you uncomfortable. What was the outcome?
  
3. How is your life a witness of Christ’s influence on your life?
  
4. When you are around non-believers, would they know that you are a fully devoted follower of Christ? Explain.
  
5. What are the things that hinder you from completely following Jesus?
  
6. What have you found to be a non-threatening way to witness to a non-believer?

7. Proverbs 10:2 says, “Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.” What do you think this means? Can you think of examples when you have seen this truth played out?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

Getting Past Religious Rules (5 day): <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/11565-getting-past-religious-rules-by-pete-briscoe>

Until Unity (5 day): <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/24765-until-unity>

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### **Growth Challenge:**

If you have non-Christian friends, take time to consider your relationship in light of the questions in the video message. Do you love them for who they are, or for how they live? Which way is the influence flowing? Are you influencing them or are you influenced by them?

# NOTES

August 13, 2023

## Session 2 | When someone dies, what happens to their spirit?

**Before you begin** this Growth Group session, watch the following video summary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8AoMm3iTcc>



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

As Christians, we know that after our life here on earth comes to an end that we will “...stand before God’s judgment seat” (Romans 14:10). After we give an account of ourselves to God, our blessed Savior will advocate for us, and even though we are sinners, we will be set “...free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2) because of our faith in Christ Jesus. What a glorious day that will be to hear Jesus say “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:23b)

*Well done, good and faithful servant!*  
Matthew 25:23b

*Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*  
Luke 23:43

As Christians, we also have questions about who else we will see when we get to heaven, and for good reason. We want to be comforted in knowing that our loved ones have successfully passed from this life into eternal life in heaven with our blessed Savior. In this lesson, we will be looking at what the scriptures tell us about entering heaven.

**Scripture:** Luke 23:32-43, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?



3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. When Jesus was sentenced to death, two others were sentenced with him. As they hung on their crosses, one of the men said, "*Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" Jesus answered him, "*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*" (Luke 23:42-43). Despite Jesus' body being placed in a tomb where it stayed for three days, when did Jesus say He and the other man would be in paradise? What was required for this man to be welcomed into paradise?
2. Was the resurrection of the dead a commonly held belief among the Jews at the time of Jesus? Refer to Acts 23:6-8.
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Ecclesiastes 12:7. Does this mean that as believers our spirits leave us to go to heaven?
4. Romans 6:23 reads "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" What does this verse tell us about eternity and our relationship with Jesus?
5. According to Romans 14:11-12, who will stand before God's judgement seat and be required to give an account of their lives?
6. The Bible tells us that it is God's plan that everyone has the opportunity to go to heaven to spend eternity (1 Timothy 2:1-4), but it also tells us that all have fallen short (Romans 3:23). According to Romans 10:9-10 what do we need to do to receive God's gift of eternal life in heaven?

7. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 we read “*For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.*” What is meant by “*fallen asleep in Him*”?

## Questions for Application:

1. When a newborn baby dies, will that child enter heaven? Refer to what the scriptures have to say about the innocent in Psalm 72:12-14.
2. Can you think of some people in your life who may not comprehend Jesus as “the way”? Read John 3:16-18. Might knowing these verses help you more fully explain God’s gift of grace to one of the names on your list?
3. In John 14:6 Jesus tells us “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” How does Jesus tell us we receive eternal life with the Father? Does He give us any wiggle room in this? What then, is your understanding of what Christians need to do in order to experience the gift of eternal life?
4. We read in Romans 8:34 that when we stand before God on Judgement Day that Christ will intercede for us. How comforting that will be to have Christ advocating for us. What can we do here on earth so that others will also have Jesus interceding for them?
5. “*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*” (2 Corinthians 5:8 NKJV). What does it mean to be absent from the body?
6. What do you believe regarding what happens when we die? Can you explain the basis of this belief?

7. If applicable, describe a time when you had an active discussion (or debate) with another believer regarding death and resurrection. In what way, if any, was your thinking changed as a result of this discussion?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

How Can I Be Sure I Am Going to Heaven (7 day reading plan): <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/30330-how-can-i-be-sure-i-am-going-to-heaven>

All About Heaven – What Happens When We Die? (5 day reading plan): <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/17529-all-about-heaven-what-happens-when-we-die>

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### **Growth Challenge:**

What can you do this week to help someone you love spend eternity in heaven?

# NOTES

August 20, 2023

## Session 3 | How should a Christian navigate the current political and social climate?

*Before you begin* this Growth Group session, watch the following video summary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLXhli-Zfs>



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Political and social issues are all around us. The top headlines in a recent issue of the Cedar Rapids Gazette were on abortion rights, regulations on carbon dioxide pipelines, union members on strike, voter registration fraud, and over-the-counter birth control. In preparation for the upcoming Iowa primaries, politicians are blanketing our state (in person and in media ads), pointing fingers at each other trying to explain to us all the things that are right and wrong in our world today. As Christians, how can we navigate this constant barrage of changing issues?

Even when it feels as if we are being crushed by earthly troubles, we can remain joyful. If we keep our focus on God, our spirit cannot be trampled.  
Mary C. Neal

*Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.*  
Psalm 31:3

In our world, current affairs seem to be competing for our attention, and screaming “follow me”. We need to remember to keep our focus on God and “follow Him”. With God as our rock, He can calm the storm and give us the direction that we need to navigate through it all. As it says in Psalm 31:3 “*Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me*”.

**Scripture:** Matthew 9:9-38

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?

3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. Read Proverbs 2:1-11. Where can we find the wisdom to navigate the political issues of today?
2. Proverbs 14:16 says, "*A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless.*" Why do you think God included this instruction in His Word?
3. In the Matthew passage for this week (Matthew 9:9-38), how did Jesus respond to the concerns and criticisms others were raising regarding his actions?
4. In Matthew 9:37, what was Jesus speaking of when He stated that "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few*"?
5. Galatians 6:10 reads, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people*". What does this mean when we apply it to politics and if we should be involved?
6. Read Hebrews 12:14-15. What is your understanding of the meaning of these verses? Does this understanding give you wisdom concerning your interactions with others?

7. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we learn that God wants us to pray for our leaders. Does it specify which leaders we are to pray for?
  
8. Read Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:17, and 27:19. Considering these verses, what does the Bible want us to do?

### Questions for Application:

1. Proverbs 3:5 states “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*”. How does this godly advice apply to the subject of this week’s sermon?
  
2. Why do you think we should pray for those that have political beliefs different than our own?
  
3. Romans 13:1 reads “*Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*” Consider this truth. How might understanding this truth impact your perspective and/or approach during future conversations?
  
4. Referring to the Matthew passages for this week (Matthew 9:9-38), what is Jesus teaching us regarding how we should respond to the concerns and criticisms of others?
  
5. The Serenity Prayer begins with “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference”. When we are faced with all the political and social issues of today it is easy to become overwhelmed. What things in your life do you have no control over that you can give to God through prayer?

6. What philosophies and understandings have you had to change as a result of studying the Bible and having a relationship with Jesus?
  
7. Do you have a friend, co-worker, or family member with whom incendiary subject matter frequently comes up in conversation? What might you say to de-escalate the conversation the next time things begin to heat up? Do you think that being prepared in advance with a response may be helpful in de-escalating things? If you struggle to find an appropriate response, ask God for help in deciding on your future course of action.
  
8. In what ways are you going to help our community socially? Where do you go from here?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic.*

Good News – Encouragement for a World in Crisis (7 day reading plan): <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/19374-good-news-encouragement-for-a-world-in-crisis>

How to Love People You Disagree With (5 day reading plan): <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/20037-how-to-love-people-you-disagree-with>

### **Question for Discussion:**

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, and service?

### **Growth Challenge:**

Reflect on how you are going to respond to political issues using the Bible as your guide. Memorize a verse that gives you comfort in troubled times.



# NOTES

August 27, 2023

## Session 4 | How do you discern whether something is God's will or our desire or thinking?

*Before you begin* this Growth Group session, watch the following video summary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rwlhjpUEOI>



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*



Have you ever thought something and wondered, “Is this God telling me something or is it my own thought?” How can you tell? How do you decide if this is God’s will for you? What if you are wrong?

Well, you are not alone. Many Christians struggle with these same questions.

Romans 12:2 reads, “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-his good, pleasing, and perfect will.*” When we become believers, we bring our own ideas and perspectives from the world. Some thoughts are more accurate than others. Other ideas are formed by our culture and education. If we want to learn to recognize where God is leading us, we need to transform the way we think. Philippians 4:8 tells us that we need to be vigilant about what we allow into our minds and what we choose to dwell on.

As we grow closer to God through prayer and reading His Word, His Will becomes clearer. Psalms 25:4-5 reads “**Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.**” We should focus on God and lean upon him to guide us. Then the path will become clearer.

*“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”*  
Psalm 25:4-5

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-2, Psalm 25:1-9

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?

2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. Does God use other people to reveal his will to me? Also read Romans 15:14 and Proverbs 11:14.
2. How do I know that what my heart desires is God's will? Romans 6:17.
3. What is the relationship between being a "*living sacrifice*" and "*renewing our minds*" with "*discerning what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God*"?
4. In Psalm 25:8-9, who does David say the Lord will guide? Why do you think that this verse specifies "the humble"?
5. In Romans 12:2, what does it mean when we are instructed to "*not conform to the pattern of this world*"? How do we do that?
6. Philippians 2:13 reads, "*for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*" What is your understanding of this verse?

7. How can you use what the Bible says about an issue to help you decide how you should understand God's will? Should what the Bible says on an issue influence your decision-making?

### Questions for Application:

1. Isn't it misleading to follow your conscience or heart because they are subjective?
2. Which way are you living out your life? God's way or your own way.
3. Do you find you are often at the border, struggling between obeying God's way or your own?
4. Do you have a method for discerning if something is God's will? If you do, can you describe it to others?
5. Read Ephesians 5:15-17. How does knowing God's will impact our ability to live "*not as unwise but as wise*"?
6. Why do you think our culture teaches us that it is a weakness to seek help, especially when the Bible teaches us to seek the Lord's help?
7. Billy Graham has said, "The will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us." What might this mean if we are experiencing opposition after doing what we believed to be God's will?

8. Adrian Rodgers has said, “Knowledge comes from looking around, wisdom comes from looking up.” When faced with a difficult question or dilemma, do you typically take it to God in prayer? Recall a time when you sought God’s wisdom before taking action on a situation. How did the situation turn out?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

God’s will for your life- 3-day plan- <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/30301-gods-will-for-your-life>

Gods Will for You-7-day plan- <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/18093-gods-will-for-you>

Discerning God’s Will-9-day plan- <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/1349-discerning-gods-will>

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### **Growth Challenge:**

As you study God’s word this week, prayerfully ask God to show you his will for your life.

# NOTES

September 3, 2023

## Session 5 | How can a person really embrace a congregation as family?



*Before you begin* this Growth Group session, watch the following video summary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-KxHuMXoJE>

### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Church family is  
God's Design

Before we explore this week's question, "How can a person really embrace a congregation as family?," it is important that we acknowledge that the church as family is God's design. The New Testament is full of examples that help us know God considers us His sons and daughters, and that fellow believers are our brothers and sisters in Christ. A few NT examples of this familial language include Romans 8:14: *"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God."* Romans 8:17a: *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."* Hebrews 2:11: *"Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."*

According to Dr. Ralph Wilson, "Love can't operate in a vacuum. We can't practice authentic Christianity without Christian fellowship because love is at the very root of God's character... Love is never solitary. It requires community to operate. Jesus believed in this so much that He made this audacious statement: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' (John 13:34-35)"

The very first Christians believed so heartily in this command that, *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had."* Acts 4:32 This verse helps us understand the all-in commitment of those first Christians, who fully invested in one another and in accomplishing Christ's mission. Almost two thousand years later, the Marion Methodist family of believers presses on with Christ's mission believing that, "Our **mission** is to make disciples of **Jesus Christ** who **worship** passionately, **love** extravagantly, and **witness** boldly." When we invest ourselves in Jesus' church and mission, and in the lives of His beloved, we are embracing His Church as family.

*"How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together  
in unity!"*  
Psalm 133:1

**Scripture:** Acts 4:32-35, Psalm 133

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

## Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

## Questions from the Bible:

1. In Mark 3:31-35 Jesus is seated among a crowd when someone tells him that his mother and brothers are outside. Jesus responds by saying, “*Who are my mother and my brothers?*” He then gestured to those seated around him and said, “*Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.*” What is your understanding of what Jesus meant in saying this?
2. In Psalm 133:1, the psalmist tells us “*How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!*” How do you picture living in unity? What is the reward? Do you think the universal church is living in unity?
3. At a time when the church at Corinth was experiencing divisions, Paul wrote them a letter in which he said, “*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*” (1 Corinthians 1:10) Does Paul mean there can never be any divisions within the church? How should the church handle disagreements? How should we?
4. In Romans 12:9-10, Paul tells us what we need to do to please God in how we treat others. “*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*” What does sincere love look like? How do we honor others above ourselves?



5. In Hebrews 13:1, we read that we are to “*keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.*” The word for love used here in the original Greek is *philadelphia*, which means the natural love that exists between brothers and sisters. In other words, as believers we’re to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Do you think this love is what non-believers see when they look at the church?
  
6. Read Colossians 3:12-17. How does this passage relate to the concept of church as family?
  
7. In today’s scripture reading from Acts, what attitude did the believers have toward one another?
  
8. Read 1 Peter 5:9 and Galatians 6:1. Why is unity important for the people of God?

### **Questions for Application:**

1. In Galatians 6:2 Paul says, “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*” What is your understanding of this verse? Give an example of a time when you experienced someone reaching out to help you with a burden, or a time when you helped to carry a burden for someone else.
  
2. What value is there to becoming like family to other believers? List as many benefits as you can.
  
3. We all have different talents and skills. That is God’s plan for His church. Doing God’s work on earth can be difficult, but when we work together as a family we can get it done. Which of your God-given talents can you use to accomplish God’s work?

4. What is your reaction when someone talks about their “church family”? Do you find yourself speaking of your “church family”? If you do, what does this term mean to you?
  
5. How do you feel Marion Methodist is doing at emulating the church Paul described in the Acts 4:32-35 passage?
  
6. What types of things inspire you to be generous? What types of things make it a challenge, or prevent you from being generous?
  
7. Unity among brothers and sisters matters to God. Does it matter to you? How can you encourage Christian unity?
  
8. It has been said, “We will never change the world by going to church. We will only change the world by being the church.” What is your response to this?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

Real Hope: Community of Christ, 5-Day Plan, <http://bible.com/r/5aW>

There Is More to Life: Belonging, 3-Day Plan, <https://bible.com/readingplans/25371/day/3?segment=0>

### **Questions for Discussion:**

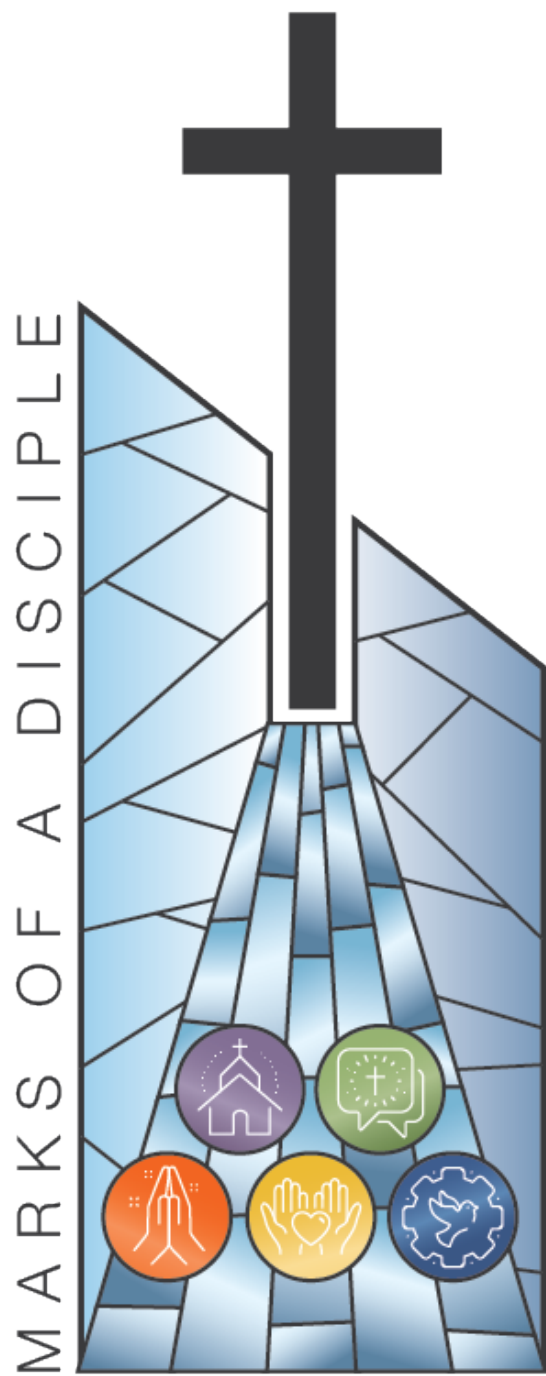
1. What are you reading in the Word this week?

2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

**Growth Challenge:**

Ask God to show you something you could do that would better connect you with members of your Marion Methodist Church family. Commit to following through on His ideas.

**NOTES**



M A R K S O F A D I S C I P L E



**Marion  
Methodist**

[www.MarionMethodist.org](http://www.MarionMethodist.org)