



Illuminate

SERMON SERIES STUDY GUIDE



Welcome to *Illuminate*, a message series born out of a season of intentional listening, reflection, and prayer. Last fall, over 300 people from Marion Methodist took part in a survey—sharing their perspectives on what God is doing in and through our church. We listened deeply to what you shared. With the help of a consultant and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our leadership—and many of you—entered into a process of discernment. Together, we asked: *Where is God leading us next?*

Out of that bubbling-up process, three clear priorities emerged—three areas where we believe God is shining a light on the path ahead. Now, taskforces are forming, ideas are being shared, and energy is growing as we take steps forward as a church family.

This series will walk us through those three priorities:

Share the Light

Ignite the Light

Be the Light

Each reflects a call to action, a way of living out our faith with intention and joy, and each connects to the deep and powerful image of light found throughout Scripture. From Genesis 1, where God's first creative words were "*Let there be light,*" to Jesus calling us the light of the world—light is a symbol of God's presence, guidance, and hope.

As we journey through this series, we pray that it will spark conversations, stir imaginations, and inspire you to take your place in the mission God has given us: to be a church that is **growing in Christ to serve the world**.

Let this series illuminate your heart and guide your steps. As we begin, we invite you to pray with us this *Prayer of Illumination*, asking God to light the way before us.

With hope and anticipation,

Pastor James & Pastor Helen

Guide me, O God,
by your Word and Spirit.
Shine your light upon me,
that your Spirit will engage my heart,
enrich my mind,
and transform my life.
Lead me to discover your will,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

April 27, 2025
Session 1 | Light the Way

Before you begin this session, read the inside cover of your materials and pray the prayer of Illumination.



Background:

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

Welcome to the Illuminate sermon series. Many of you are aware of the recent results of the survey that our church has taken. From this survey the teams have produced a 3-year action plan. Our taskforce is focusing on the implementation of these priorities. We will be diving into the priorities in the coming weeks. The Holy Spirit, with wind and fire, will lead us to be a blessing to our community and world.

Imagine that you are talking with your children at the breakfast table, or just outside talking to friends when suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind was heard. You would naturally wonder where this sound came from and go to investigate. Then you realize that it was in your neighborhood, and the people in the houses were speaking differently from the last time you spoke to them. You would wonder what is going on.

“Often you can see power lines running alongside the street. Unless current is flowing through them, there is no light. The power line is you and I! The current is God! We have the power to allow the current to flow through us and thus to generate the light of the world: JESUS – or to refuse to be used and, thus, allow the darkness to spread.”

Mother Teresa

“...both Jews and Gentiles converted to Judaism, and some of us are from Crete and Arabia- yet all of us hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things that God has done!”

Acts 2:11 GNT

That is what happened in this week’s Scripture. Acts 2:1-12 is the miracle of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples, and they began to speak in different languages. The Jews from every nation gathered and asked, how are they speaking in my own language? *“What does this mean?”*

In Psalm 27 David wrote, *“The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”* With Jesus as our light, whom should you fear? No one. Jesus does not ask us to

walk in darkness but to shine His light for everyone to see.

Scripture: Acts 2:1-12 and Psalm 27:1-5

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

Sermon Reflection:

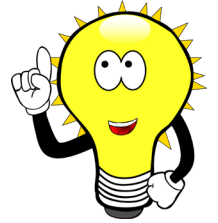
1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?

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. Verse 12 of this week's scripture ends with the question, "*What does this mean?*" What is your answer to their question?
2. Read Psalm 27:4. What is the significance of the "one thing" that the psalmist asks of the Lord?
3. Read Acts 19:6. When Paul says the Holy Spirit came on the people and they spoke in tongues and prophesied, is this the same thing that happened on the day of Pentecost that is recounted in today's Scripture from Acts 2:1-12?
4. What signs happened when the Holy Spirit came? Why were these signs important for everyone to hear?
5. How do we receive the Holy Spirit? (See Acts 2:38, John 7:37-39)

6. Today, a cartoon would use an illustration like this to represent a light bulb moment (a moment of realization). How is this like what happened at Pentecost?



7. In the Old Testament, God dwelt on earth in the temple where only the High Priest was allowed to enter. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit initially descended upon the Apostles. How was this a significant change in their relationship with God?

Questions for Application:

1. Read what Jesus had to say about the Spirit of Truth in John 14:16-17. Have you experienced the Holy Spirit speaking through you? What happened?
2. What does the psalmist's request to " *dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life* " mean to you?
3. How would you explain to a non-believer how it feels to be empowered by the Holy Spirit?
4. If you saw the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, how do you think you would have responded? Why?

5. How can you be more open to seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit in your daily life? What would that look like?

6. Pentecost symbolizes how the Holy Spirit can bring unity to the church, as in the way the Holy Spirit united all those present in Jerusalem. This allowed them to understand the multitude of languages that were being spoken and gave the Apostles the courage to spread the Good News. What do you think Marion Methodist can do to bring unity to our community and spread the Good News?

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

Darkness to Light: An Easter Story-7-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/24617-darkness-to-light-an-easter-story>

Let Your Light Shine-5-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/27717-let-your-light-shine>

Illuminate: Living in the Light -5-day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/15642-illuminate-living-in-the-light>



Darkness to Light



Let Your Light Shine



Illuminate

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:

How can you be the light of Jesus in an area of darkness? Where will you start?

NOTES

May 4, 2025

Session 2 | Share the Light

Before you begin this session, read the inside cover of your materials and pray the prayer of Illumination.



Background:

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

When discussing “*Love your neighbor as yourself*”, Jesus was once asked “*Who is my neighbor?*” and He replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is important for us to understand what a Samaritan represents in this story. Samaritans are descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel, while Jews are descendants of the southern kingdom of Israel. Jews and Samaritans are similar in that they are all descendants of Abraham, worship the God of Abraham, and believe that Moses was a prophet of God. But Samaritans believe that the only Holy Scriptures are the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and that Moses was the only prophet sent by God. Jews believe that Jerusalem is the Holy City, while Samaritans believe holy days are to be celebrated on Mt. Gerizim. In Biblical times, Jews despised the Samaritans, considering them to be unclean, and in John 4:9 we learn that “*Jews do not associate with Samaritans.*”

So Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan about a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. The priest and the

Go and do likewise.
Luke 10:37b

Levite ignored the man that had been robbed and beaten, while the Samaritan “*took pity on him*”, took care of him and paid to have him nursed back to good health. Jesus closes with concluding that the Samaritan was the neighbor, and that we should “*Go and do likewise.*” There were undoubtedly some audible gasps throughout the crowd as Jesus concludes this parable.

Now, two thousand years later, what can we (Marion Methodist) learn from this parable about how to **Share the Light**? First, we need to open our doors to our neighbors and **Invite** them to be part of our church family. Second, we need to engage our neighbors and **Include** ourselves in community events. Finally, we need to care for one another and **Instill** what Christ has taught us so that we can be a shining light in our community. We need to become a beacon in our community that calls out to our neighbors to join us!

We need to become a beacon in our community that calls out to our neighbors to join us!

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37 and Matthew 5:14

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. For what reason did the legal expert ask Jesus “*who is my neighbor?*”, and how did Jesus answer him?
2. According to this scripture, what is most important to Jesus – what a person knows, what a person does, or how a person relates to other people?
3. The priests and Levites are respected people in Jewish culture. Why would they ignore the man that had been attacked by robbers?
4. What is Jesus teaching us through the parable of the Good Samaritan?
5. How does the parable of the Good Samaritan shed light on how God sees each of us?

6. In Galatians 6:2 we read “*Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*” What do you think it means to “*carry each other’s burdens*”?

7. After the instruction to “*carry each other’s burdens*”, Paul tells us that in doing so, we “*will fulfill the Law of Christ.*” What is the Law of Christ?

8. In Matthew 5:14 Jesus states “*You are the light of the world.*” What was Jesus teaching us?

Questions for Application:

Share your responses to these questions with the church leadership at

<https://forms.gle/FtMxN1dxPJdktYoo8>



Invite: Inviting Community to our sites

1. Is there a group from the Marion Community that you feel would benefit from using Marion Methodist facilities (i.e. the 5050 building and surrounding property, and the Carnegie church office building downtown)?

2. How do you feel people in our community can learn more about Marion Methodist?

3. What role can you play in inviting people in our community to the wonderful events that Marion Methodist already hosts? (Think about the events you’re already participating in that you could invite your friends, family and neighbors to join.)

Include: Participating in Community events

4. How do you think that Marion Methodist could be more present at events in our community?

5. How do you think Marion Methodist could support the schools in our community?

6. What groups are you involved in at Marion Methodist that you could invite to participate in Marion Community events?

Instill: Training & Equipping people for Spiritual Conversations

7. What keeps you from sharing your faith with others? What would help you feel more comfortable when sharing your faith?

8. How could Marion Methodist help equip you to share your testimony?

9. Would hearing testimonials from others help encourage you to share your faith story? What would be the best way for you to hear those testimonials (e.g. during Sunday services, in Bible study, via e-mail, watching on-line, via social media, etc)?

Dig Deeper: Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

The Good Samaritan – 5 day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/1846-the-good-samaritan>



The Good Samaritan

Sharing the Gospel – 20 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/20823-sharing-the-gospel>



Sharing the Gospel

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 gifts has God given you that will help you “Share the Light” in our community?

NOTES

May 11, 2025

Session 3 | Ignite the Light

Before you begin this session, read the inside cover of your materials and pray the prayer of Illumination.



Background:

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

In verse 22 of this week's scripture Paul states, "I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might save some." Paul was not saying that he was an early version of The Great Imposter¹, posing as someone he was not. What he was saying is that he worked to find common ground with those he met, knowing that this would give credence to his message, making it easier for him to introduce others to Christ Jesus.

"I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might save some."

1 Corinthians 9:22b

The Gospel is one message for all mankind, but the approach to learning about God and studying His Word is not a one-size-fits-all model. To be able to offer a credible witness to the works of God in our lives, we first need to find common ground. There is a story of a missionary couple that went to minister to people in a distant land. After a month of tirelessly trying to get people to listen to his message about God and His Word, with no apparent progress, he was ready to give up and return home a failure. She, however, felt she was making great progress. She had spent the first month getting to know the people, working in the fields with them, helping with the children, and sharing the load in the daily struggles of life. As she worked alongside them, she began to introduce them to Jesus and to the Word of God. Because they knew she cared for them, they listened to her words and wanted to know more. If there is a moral to this story, it is that people often need to know that we care about them, before they care about what we have to say to them.

... people often need to know that we care about them, before they care about what we have to say to them.

At Marion Methodist, we seek to **Illuminate** our communities and the world around us with the Light of Christ. One of the strategies for accomplishing this is to **Ignite the Light**, reaching all generations. Three tactics have been identified to support this strategy. They are:

- **Create:** Develop engaging environments for all generations
- **Cater:** Host opportunities for multigenerational connections
- **Care:** Care for our community (support groups, mental health, parenting)

Will you join with your fellow Marion Methodists and work to bring this vision to life in your community?

¹Ferdinand Waldo Demara Jr. (December 1921 – June 7, 1982), also a book by Robert Chrichton and a 1961 movie starring Tony Curtis.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and John 8:12

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. In this week's scripture, what did Paul mean when he wrote, "*I have made myself a slave to everyone*"?

2. What does it mean to "*become all things to all people*"?

3. What do the words of Paul in this week's scripture teach you regarding his method and passion for sharing the Gospel message?

4. In John 8:12, Jesus states: "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" What was Jesus telling us with these words?

5. In the days of the early church, Jews and many converts to Christianity continued to follow dietary restrictions established during the days of Moses. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-33. What do you think Paul is encouraging Christians to do regarding food? How would this bring glory to God?

6. John Wesley famously stated, “*The world is my parish*” and would preach to the unchurched in open fields, spreading the Gospel to all who would listen. How does this compare to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians where he stated, “*I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might save some*”?

Questions for Application:

Share your responses to these questions with the church leadership at <https://forms.gle/rUwP2wnbsiKwet9v6>



Create: Develop engaging environments for all generations

1. Have you experienced obstacles that have kept you or others from engaging in ministry at Marion Methodist? What were they? What would make it easier for people to use our facility?

2. If you could dream about the church building, what improvement/adjustment would you want to see happen? How would it improve the way you use the building? How would it help Marion Methodist grow and serve our community?

3. Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings tend to be the busiest times at Marion Methodist. Would your group consider using the church as a gathering place on a different day? How can we make it easier for you to use the church facilities?

10. What is a stage of life that you think has the most need for support? (Example: grief, marriage, birth, graduation, empty nest, retirement, etc.)

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

Making Faith Magnetic, 12-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/32304-making-faith-magnetic>

How to Make and Keep Godly Friends, 3-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/33716-how-to-make-and-keep-godly-friends>

Listen | Connect | Help, 7-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/23386-listen-connect-help>



Making Faith Magnetic



How to Make & Keep Godly Friends



Listen/Connect/Hope

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:

How will you seek to find common ground with a neighbor, friend or stranger so that you can ignite the light of Christ in their life?

NOTES

May 18, 2025

Session 4 | Be the Light - Connect Jesus and Others

Before you begin this session, read the inside cover of your materials and pray the prayer of Illumination.



Background:

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

“Do you want to be made well?”¹ The man’s answer seems painfully obvious so why does Jesus ask? Jesus is love, there is no malice in Him, so this feels like an odd question to ask of a man who spends his days at the local healing waters. What if we consider this question allegorically, as if it were directed at everyone reading it, hearing it, contemplating it? “Do you want to be made well?”¹ More specifically, do you want to be made whole?

“Do you want to be made well?”
John 5:6b NKJV

In John 10:10b ESV Jesus tells us, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” What is it that keeps your life from feeling whole and abundant?

- The need to graduate; pass an exam; get a job; get a better job; retire
- The need to meet your person; get married; have a child; end a relationship
- The need for more time; more money; a better house; different friends
- The need for her; him; them to apologize or change
- The need to beat a disease; beat an addiction; conquer a fear; forgive
- The need to “get over” grief; depression; anger; hurt; betrayal
- The need to lose weight; get in shape

Christian community is “having meaningful relationships where we do life together by sharing, encouraging, serving, forgiving, and chasing faithfully after God.”

Better Together, YouVersion

The circumstances of our lives can be paralyzing, trapping us in places of spiritual poverty, but we must resist this! We are more than the circumstances of our lives. (Thank God!) Our circumstances are ever changing; an ironic truth that never changes. Abundant life will not be found outside of our circumstances, it must be found within them and in spite of them. “Jesus doesn’t change our outer circumstances. He changes us. He calls us into a new way of being, seeing, acting, speaking and thinking.”²

Jesus cautions us in Luke 11:35, “See to it then, that the light within you is not darkness.” Step away from the darkness of circumstance into His glorious Light, and Be the Light:

- **Belong:** Establish ways to connect with Marion Methodist
- **Believe:** Grow in your faith
- **Become:** More like Jesus

You are being called out of the darkness into a new way of being, seeing, acting, speaking and thinking. Join your Marion Methodist family as we connect with Jesus and one another and live to **Be the Light** of Christ.

¹John 5:6b NKJV; ²Michael K. Marsh.

Scripture: John 5:1-9 and Psalm 119:105

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. What does Bethesda mean?
2. Why did Jesus ask the disabled man if he wanted to be made well? Why is this question important/necessary?
3. What can we learn about becoming “whole” from the story of Jesus healing the man that was disabled for thirty-eight years?

4. Read John 13:34-35. In these verses Jesus commands us to “*love one another.*” How does loving with this kind of love help us to **Be the Light** of Christ in the world?

5. Psalm 119:105 NLT reads, “*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.*” Knowing that light is necessary to eliminate darkness, what is the psalmist telling us?

6. In John 8:12, Jesus states: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” What is Jesus telling us?

Questions for Application:

Share your responses to these questions with the church leadership at <https://forms.gle/rtVhWRcoV9dyxkCK9>



Belong: You are a beloved member of Jesus’ family. Actively engage with Marion Methodist

1. What made you, or would have made you, feel welcomed when you first came to Marion Methodist? When you see newcomers, how do you help them to feel welcomed?

2. Where do you feel you have your strongest connections to Marion Methodist? (Examples: worship, fellowship time, study group, serving in ministry, etc.)

3. How can we enhance our invitational and welcoming atmosphere?

Believe: Pursue spiritual growth through participation and Bible study

4. Where do you experience small group discipleship? Are you a part of a group that you would like to develop into a small group?

5. What has been your biggest obstacle in joining a small group/Bible study?

6. Who are some of the people you would like to participate in a small group with?

Become: Become more like Jesus through living out your Christian faith

7. Are there community organizations where you might volunteer regularly?

8. Where is God calling you to be a leader or a mentor?

9. How can Marion Methodist help equip you to lead in your called area of ministry?

Dig Deeper: Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Better Together: Seeking God with Others – 7 Days: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/16346-better-together-seeking-god-with-others>

Real Hope: Abundant Life – 7 Days: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/40223-real-hope-abundant-life>



Better Together



Real Hope

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:

It has been said that Christian community is “having meaningful relationships where we do life together by sharing, encouraging, serving, forgiving, and chasing faithfully after God.” In as much as Christian community depends on you, endeavor to live in it.

NOTES

Questions from the Bible:

1. In Matthew 5:14-16 we read that we are supposed to let our light shine for all to see. How does this relate to witnessing?
2. Read 1 Peter 3:15. What are we being told to be prepared for?
3. “*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;*” (Hebrews 12:15a ESV). How does this instruction pertain to sharing your faith story with others?
4. What special training did the disciples have to assume Jesus’ ministry? Read Matthew 28:18-20. What differences exist between how the original disciples were prepared to fulfill the Great Commission and how we have been prepared?

Questions for Application:

1. What do you want your friends and family to remember about your life?
2. The Background gives a 25/25/50 formula for sharing your testimony. If you were asked today, what would be your 25 regarding your personal encounter with Jesus?

3. Building on your response to question 2, what would you want to stress to others regarding your life after that encounter? How has your life changed since that encounter? What struggles has God helped you through?

4. Now consider your life before that encounter with the Living Lord. What aspects of your previous life are you glad to have left behind? What was missing in that life that you have found in Jesus?

5. Now you have your personal story. What is your 25/25/50 testimony?

6. Perhaps you are struggling with your testimony because you were raised in the church and don't recall a time without Christ in your life. That is your story, so use it. What has God taken you through in your life? What have you walked through with Jesus that could have been difficult without the comforting presence of the Lord? How has your relationship with the Lord empowered you to share the good news and to be a light to the world?

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

Witness: Be the Ripple Effect in Your Sphere of Influence- 5- day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/29224-be-the-ripple-effect-in-your-sphere-of-influence>

To Be a Witness, a Lifestyle... -7- day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/30274-to-be-a-witness-a-lifestyle>

Authentic Witnessing in Today's World -5- day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/2311-authentic-witnessing-in-todays-world>



Witness



To Be A Witness



Authentic Witnessing

Questions for Discussion:

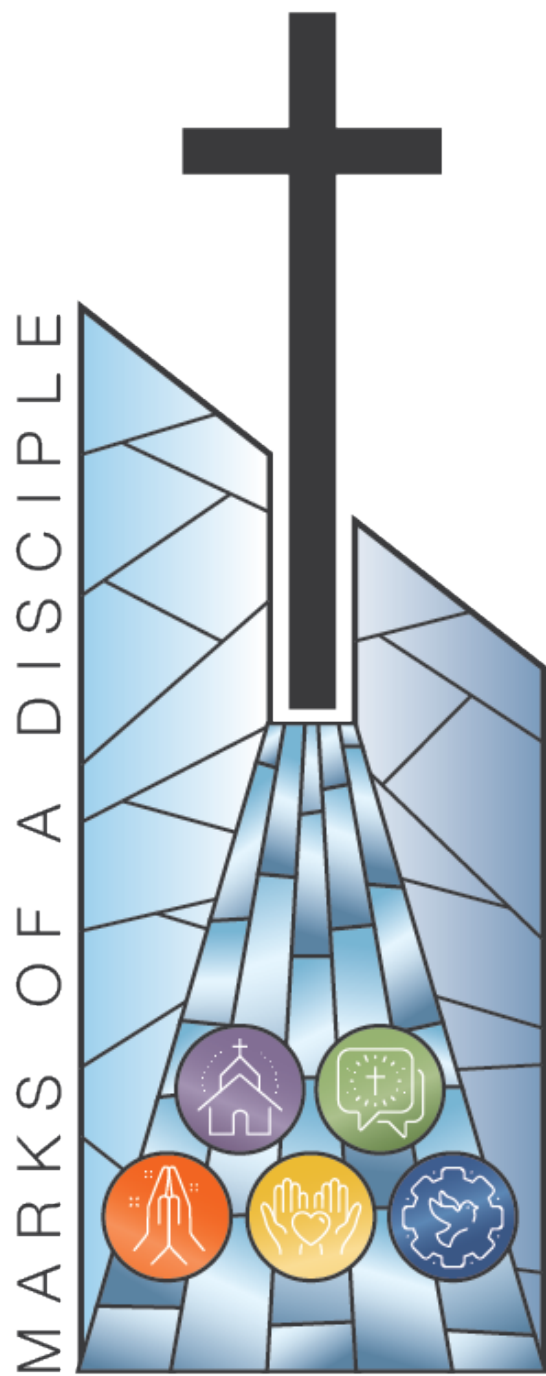
1. What are you reading in the Word this week?

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

Growth Challenge:

This week make time to construct your story of witness. It's time to make Jesus a priority.

NOTES



MARKS OF A DISCIPLE



www.MarionMethodist.org