

Instructions:

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.

**Series: Any Questions**

What is the will of God? Why do bad things happen to good people? How can I face the future? Does prayer really work? Asking questions and having doubts is a normal part of the human experience. We do not have to be ashamed of our doubts or hide our questions before God. In fact, God fully welcomes them and welcomes us. It is even possible that we are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we have all the answers.

This Lent, join us as we bring some of our biggest questions and doubts to God. We will practice embracing this deeply human part of ourselves of asking, wondering, and wrestling in the mystery of faith as we move together toward the great and joyous hope of the Easter resurrection.

Message Description:

How does God's sovereignty and human free will work for salvation? If God is all knowing and all-powerful, does God determine who will be saved? These questions surrounding the providence of God (i.e. God's divine will, plan, or ordination of all events) have long impacted Christian followers, thinkers, and teachers. Throughout the course of Church history, several theories around predestination have emerged; a Calvinistic approach that believes God elects some for salvation and others for damnation according to God's foreknowledge and will, and an Arminian approach that sees God's gracious gift of salvation available to all according to God's foreknowledge of who will respond in faith, but not according to God's pre-ordained will. This salvation can be rejected, the grace of Christ resisted. It is a response offered to each person.

Yet, the exact way God and human work together along the way of salvation is a mystery, a divine dance. The only assurance of salvation? The love of God shed aboard in our hearts by the Spirit, at work in us that we may grow to become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, and self-controlled. As Methodists, we believe our salvation is a lifelong process of growth into grace and that *how* we live our lives matters.

Key Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Romans 8:26-30; John 9:1-3; Philippians 2:12-13

Questions based on this week's teaching:

1. Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel once said, "We are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we have the answers." Has this been true for you? Why or why not?
2. What did you learn about the theories of predestination, both Calvinism and Arianism? What questions do you still have?
3. How do you think God's will and human will work together to accomplish God's plan for salvation of the world?
4. What questions do you still have on the sovereignty of God?
5. What comfort do you find in the mystery of salvation? Do you think we can have assurance now?

Summary of Calvinism vs. Arminianism

	John Calvin* Foundation laid by Augustine	John Wesley Foundation laid by Arminius
T	Total Depravity - Human beings are so affected by the negative consequences of original sin that they are incapable of being righteous, and are always and unchangeably sinful; human freedom is totally enslaved by sin so we can only choose evil.	Deprivation - Human beings are sinful and without God, incapable (deprived) on their own of being righteous; however, they are not irredeemably sinful and can be transformed by God's grace; God's prevenient grace restores to humanity the freedom of will.
U	Unconditional Election - Since human beings cannot choose for themselves, God by His eternal decree has chosen or elected some to be counted as righteous, without any conditions being placed on that election.	Conditional Election - God has chosen that all humanity be righteous by His grace, yet has called us to respond to that grace by exercising our God-restored human freedom as a condition of fulfilling election.
L	Limited Atonement - The effects of the Atonement, by which God forgave sinful humanity, are limited only to those whom He has chosen.	Unlimited Atonement - The effects of the Atonement are freely available to all those whom He has chosen, which includes all humanity, "whosoever will."
I	Irresistible Grace - The grace that God extends to human beings to effect their election cannot be refused, since it has been decreed by God.	Resistible Grace - God's grace is free and offered without merit; however, human beings have been granted freedom by God and can refuse His grace.
P	Perseverance of the Saints - Since God has decreed the elect, and they cannot resist grace, they are unconditionally and eternally secure in that election.	Assurance and Security - There is security in God's grace that allows assurance of salvation, but that security is in relation to continued faithfulness; we can still defiantly reject God.

To learn more, consider reading John Wesley's sermons on "Thoughts Upon God's Sovereignty" or "A Scripture way of Salvation":

https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_thoughts-upon-gods-sove_wesley-john_1777_0/page/n3/mode/2up

<https://wesleyscholar.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Sermon-Scripture-Way-of-Salvation-1769.pdf>

Or following articles that attempt to explain the above:

<https://seedbed.com/predestination-and-gods-sovereignty/>

<https://www.newstartdiscipleship.com/post/john-wesley-condensed-sermons-the-scripture-way-of-salvation>

Please be intentional about praying together!

Consider joining us as a house group for one of our Thursday nights of prayer and worship throughout Lent.

Starting February 1 at 7pm, the pastoral team will meet in the lower level at MUMC (enter building A their main sanctuary building) for an intentional time of prayer and worship as we seek God's presence and guidance in this season.

Let us not underestimate the power of our community coming together in an hour of need to pray!