

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST 2018

SERIES 3: ...in love

SERIES OVERVIEW

According to Charles Wesley, *Love* is the “nature and... name” of God. Continuing with the text of Wesley’s epic hymn, “Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown,” God is not just “Love,” but “pure, Universal Love,” whose mercies move “to me, to all.” Therefore, the movement of love in the human community can be understood to be the movement of the Spirit as an offering of love for all people.

In this series of texts from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, there are concrete actions that Paul suggests, and they all have their foundation in the love of God. In the first week, Paul stresses the need for unity—not that all will be the same, but that all people have different gifts that complement each other and can be used in building up the entire body in love. In the second week, we are called to a very difficult task: “Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph. 5:1-2, NRSV). What does it mean to imitate God? Earlier in this passage, Paul gives a helpful list of actions to consider. Week three encourages a return of love from the people to God by giving thanks and being filled with the Spirit. Lastly, the well-known passage related to the “whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11, NRSV) even has its groundings in love. Notice all the parts of the armor are not intended for violence, but living out the love of God—in truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit. We tend to focus upon the warlike images in this last passage, but the things they represent obviously point toward the love of God. In addition, the image of “standing” doesn’t necessarily mean “standing still.” This is an act of preparation, of getting up and getting ready. To do what? Well, that is in the hands of the church.

As a part of this series, it will be just as important to focus upon “community” as “unity.” What is your church doing to:

- 1) Build one another up *in love*?
- 2) Live *in love*?
- 3) Give thanks *in love*?
- 4) Move *in love*?

For many communities, school will be resuming around this time. As you prepare for worship, what are some ways the church can act in love in the public witness of worship and in the community by preparing children and partnering with schools? What are acts of blessing and commissioning, whether for students or teachers, that can embody acts of love? May the love of God be felt, received, and shared as these and other actions are taken “...in love.”

Week 1: August 5 **Build Up**
[Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

Week 2: August 12 **Live**
[Ephesians 4:25-5:2](#)

Week 3: August 19 **Give Thanks**
[Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

Week 4: August 26 **Move**
[Ephesians 6:10-20](#)

Use "Maker in Whom We Live" (*United Methodist Hymnal*, 88)
Also "O God, in Whom We Live" (*Worship and Song*, 3153)

...IN LOVE
WEEK 1: BUILD UP
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
August 5, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Lectionnaire en français, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/le-lectionnaire-oecumenique-revise>

Calendar Notes

August

All Month [Back to School Resources](#)

August 5 **August Worship Series Begins: "...In Love"**

September

All Month [Season of Creation](#) (2018 series coming soon)

September 3 [Labor Day \(USA\)](#)

September 15-

October 15 [Hispanic Heritage Month \(USA\)](#)

October

October 6 **October Series in Job** (2018 Resources Forthcoming)

October 7 [World Communion Sunday](#)

October 14 [Children's Sabbath](#)

October 21 [Laity Sunday](#)

October 31 [Reformation Day](#)

November

November 1 [All Saints Day](#)

November 4 [All Saints Sunday](#)

[Daylight Saving Time Ends \(USA\)](#)

Dwellings (2018 Resources Forthcoming)

November 11 [Organ and Tissue Donor Sunday](#)

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

[Veteran's Day \(USA\)](#)

[Extended Advent Begins](#)

November 18 [Bible Sunday](#)

November 18-25 [National Bible Week \(USA\)](#)

November 22
November 25

[Thanksgiving Day \(USA\)](#)
[Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday](#)
[United Methodist Student Day \(offering\)](#)

Planning for This Series

Today marks the beginning of a new four-week series. We are following the Ephesians passages in the lectionary. You can do this series in the month of August, as originally planned, or you can place this anywhere in the year that you may need a four-week worship series.

Paul's writing asserts that Christians are created to live in community with one another. This requires a certain level of spiritual maturity that we can reach only when we act toward one another in the spirit of Christian love. Hence the names for our series: ...in Love. Each week we will focus on the text and how Paul instructs us to act. The first week, we must "Build Up One Another in Love." The second week, we are called to "Live in Love." The third week, we must "Give Thanks in Love." The fourth week is a sending text: it is not about life in the Christian community, but about putting on the armor of God so that we may go out into the world with a gospel message of love. You may consider a commissioning of some kind on this last week. If school is starting in your area, commission the teachers in your congregation. If confirmation classes are getting underway, commission the teachers and the students. Perhaps organize an all-church service project at the end of the month.

Some churches do their fall kick-off in the month of August. Consider using the small-group and children's resources in tandem with the worship pieces to focus your church on their life as a Christian community.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week's Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

There's a Spirit of Love in This Place

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3148
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 60-64 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano, organ, band, or rhythm section
Notes: This song by Mark Miller would make a great theme song for the entire "...In Love" series. Singing this work would be fitting at any point during the worship service, but it would be

especially poignant as the last song of an opening worship set to put the language of love and peace on the mouths of the gathered community near the beginning of the service.

Resources: [Hymn Study](#)

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2223

Recommended Key: Em–Fm

Tempo: 92-136 bpm (quarter note)

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, solo guitar, strings, or any band ensemble (rock, jazz, etc.)

Notes: Another option for a theme song for the series, I would wager this is one of the most widely sung works across worship styles throughout the church. The unity expressed in the text and the immediately recognizable tune make this a congregational favorite, even across generational lines. As indicated in the tempo suggestion above, it is possible to sing this in a variety of ways, whether slow or fast, and across genres. Experiment with the accompaniment, and be encouraged to sing boldly!

In Unity We Lift Our Song

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2221

Recommended Key: C

Tempo: 100-108 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Written to Martin Luther's well-known tune EIN' FESTE BURG, this text calls us to embrace unity within community, and the tune further supports the image of a fortress (à la "A Mighty Fortress") as one that strongly unites.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Make Us One

Source: *Zion Still Sings*, 93; *The Faith We Sing*, 2224

Recommended Key: C

Tempo: 48 bpm

Instrumentation: Piano, organ, rhythm section

Notes: This is a very short, slow chorus that can be used liturgically at different points throughout the service to reinforce the spirit of unity. Three-part (and possibly four-

part) gospel harmonies are included in the Singer's Edition of these resources.

One Bread, One Body

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 620
Recommended Key: G
Tempo: 84-90 bpm
Instrumentation: Guitar, piano, or organ; wind or string instruments can also play on melody
Notes: Originating from popular folk traditions in the 1960s and 1970s, this congregational song is always a great choice on Communion Sundays. It includes text that addresses the open table—Christ's table—in which all people who repent of their sins and seek to live in peace with one another are welcome to dine.

We Are One in Christ Jesus (Somos Uno en Cristo)

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2229
Recommended Key: Em
Tempo: 90-94 bpm
Instrumentation: Guitar, piano, percussion
Notes: The Spanish text of this song is fairly easy to learn, so we encourage you to sing it in Spanish. If you are using the pew songbooks, the translation is there for those who need it. If you have a license to reprint the words on the screen, put the Spanish and English translations together. Keep the instrumentation light, the rhythm bouncy, and the atmosphere celebratory!

Perfect Us in Love

Source: See Resources link below
Recommended Key: D
Tempo: 88-92 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano, guitar, or organ
Notes: This work was created for use in Discipleship Ministries' worship series by Taylor Burton-Edwards, and it is a combination of two Charles Wesley texts, "Jesus, United by Thy Grace," and "Try Us, O God." Language of "building up" is included, along with a text that lifts up the doctrine of Christian perfection.

Resources:

[Musical Score](#)

PREACHING NOTES

You know that moment in your sermon when you're about to turn the corner? You've been proclaiming the goodness of God's grace and now you're approaching the question that is forcing its way forward in everyone's mind: "so what?" Much like a sermon moving from the proclamation of God's grace to the "so what" of discipleship, this week's passage marks a pivotal turning point in Ephesians. The first three chapters have focused on the theological side of things, the mystery of God's grace that has been revealed, and now, with a resounding "therefore," the author prepares to turn to the practical side of things, which will occupy the last three chapters (and thus our texts for the rest of this series).

And in good sermonic fashion, the author gives us in these sixteen verses an overview—"here's where we've been, here's where we're going"—of what the road looks like: God has called you to unity, which is a divine gift. Unity, however, does not mean uniformity, but rather diversity and dynamism in a body of people who have been variously gifted so that they may grow into maturity by developing their gifts and building up in love. Building up is a major theme of this "practical" portion of the epistle. But as much as the author tells us where we're going, questions immediately rise in our mind:

Who does the building up?

What is being built up?

And how do we accomplish this building up?

First, the author has already indicated that the work of building up is not our work alone, but work that we accomplish cooperatively with God. Earlier in chapter 2, the author has already indicated that it is God who has done the building (2:20-21) and now we are being equipped with gifts for building up (4:11-12). The verb "equip" here literally means "to set," like a bone, so as to orient correctly. And so it can be tempting to think here that our job in ministry is to take up the work of setting things right, of getting people properly oriented toward Christ. And to some extent, that is true.

But lest we think too quickly that God is handing off the task to us and it's now our responsibility, the author turns back around at the end of this week's passage to remind us that, ultimately, as members of Christ's body, it is Christ who is building up. If, as the passage says, ministers are the ligaments, then it is our job to pull/hold things together, to strengthen unity. And ministers are themselves Christ's gifts, working under the authority and control of Christ, not authorities in themselves.

So what is being built up?

This may seem self-evident, as the passage tells us that it is the body that is to be built up. But, again, it's tempting to miss the forest for the trees. A body is a dynamic organism and, as such, is not rigid and stiff but requires flexibility. And it requires all of its parts to function properly. We are to go about the work of equipping and building up

*within the presumed unity already established by God (2:11–22), a unity that is expressed in the *ekklesia*.*

It's tempting to translate *ekklesia* as "church," as we think of it (as a modern institution), but it's helpful here to remember that *ekklesia* originally referred the ancient Greek political—and democratic—assembly of citizens, an image that stands in stark contrast to the imperial social structure of Roman times. No member in the *ekklesia* is the imperial head (or perhaps even the neck!). The call to unity here must be read critically—and radically—against the historical rhetoric of social cohesion within the empire. Nor is the *ekklesia* equivalent to a modern democracy. Rather, in the *ekklesia*, all are subject to Christ, who is the head (and the Spirit, who is perhaps the neck?). Social systems and hierarchies and relationships must be critically assessed and reconceived at every level.

The call here is to *unity*, not uniformity—nor even purity—as tempting as that might be. There is one God, who is the head of all things, and it is God who is at work in all things to unite all things under one head, who is Christ (cf. 1:10–11, 39). Indeed, the first three chapters have largely been dedicated to describing how all things have been reconnected in Christ, including the reconnection of divided, diverse, "hostile" people with *very* different moral codes. We have been called to work with God to maintain and build up this unity. In fact, the author emphasizes the depth and breadth of the divinely established unity by quoting from what may very likely have been an early baptismal liturgy: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (4:4–6). As we go about the work of equipping and building up, we must ask ourselves: "Does our work empower *all* the baptized? Or do we value our own preferences more than God's unity?"

So, how *do* we go about the work of building up the body?

First, we are called to live a life worthy of our calling. The language of "calling" evokes the language of the opening of the epistle (cf. 1:4–18) in which the author told us that we are called by God to a new hope—not a new law—of peace and reconciliation.

Second, we are not called to *create* the peace or unity—that has been established by God in Christ (cf. 2:11–22)—but rather, we are called to *perform* it. And how are we to "perform" such peace and unity? By living, literally "walking," a life in love worthy of our calling. And walking in love is characterized by humility, gentleness, and patience—characteristics that are all geared toward maintaining and strengthening unity. Humility is marked by living for the other in selflessness and renouncing the will to rule (cf. Acts 20:19). Patience can also be translated as "forbearance" and is marked by tolerance and enduring one another.

Third, the goal of building up is transformation—or sanctification in Wesleyan terms! We are called to reach maturity (v. 13), and even here, the call toward unity is

present. We are called to maturity, not each of us individually, but rather all of us together as one corporate mature person (cf. 2:15–16). To emphasize this, this singular mature person (vv. 12–13) is contrasted with plural children (v. 14): individualism is a sign of childishness; unity is a sign of maturity. The maturity of the full stature of Christ requires us to stay together. Our transformation is realized only in relation to one another; it is social rather than individual.

Ultimately, we are called to love. Our conduct is to be measured by who God is and what God has done. God is calling us to rewrite the grammar and meaning of love into the “economy” of Christ, and the economy that God has given us, and that the first three chapters have laid out, is one of unity and love. So, whereas the measure—the economy—of the Levitical covenant was holiness and purity (cf. Lev 19:2), the measure—the economy—of Christ’s covenant is love, and we must rewrite the grammar of what it means to live “in love” within *this* economy. But lest the idea of “rewriting a grammar” seem like a foreign concept, it shouldn’t be to us as Wesleyans. It’s exactly what we do when we talk about “perfection.” We speak of being perfected “in love.” We rewrite the grammar of what it means to be perfect from something that is flawless to something that exists “perfectly” within an economy of love.

We human beings tend to be binary thinkers, and so the “therefore” at the beginning of this week’s passage can lead us to think in a linear and binary way: first the theology (*kerygma*), then, as a consequence (“therefore”), the ethic (*didache*). But God doesn’t think in such a linear/binary way. The ethic isn’t something that comes after the theology. When it does—when it is cut off from the theology—it is disfigured from grace into a (new) law. “In” is a subordinating/locating preposition. It locates something within a larger context: do you mean the mess in the kitchen or the mess in the living room? We are called to walk “in” love, to conduct ourselves (ethic) in an economy of love (theology).

We might think of it like this: rather than receiving instructions on how to build and grow a garden and then going off and constructing one on our own, we must plant—and grow—“in” the soil that God has turned and prepared for us. And that soil is love. And just as God calls us to rewrite the grammar and meaning of love into the economy of Christ, so we must rewrite the grammar and meaning of what it means to build up the body of Christ, including what it means to speak the truth “in” love.

As we will see throughout this series, so much of the message of Ephesians is geared toward what it means to be a community of good communicators. The gifts mentioned in this week’s passage largely deal with communication (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), and those so gifted are called to guard against deceit and speak the truth, but all this is to be done in an economy of love, the grammar for which is determined by Christ’s own work.

In an effort to help us see what it means to walk in love, building up and maintaining the unity God has established, the author of Ephesians has used the image

of the body, an image Paul uses several times throughout his epistles. In an age in which medical science (and biomechanics) have advanced so far that we can, in our efforts to achieve the best health and healing possible given the circumstances, remove and/or replace body parts, this may not be the best metaphor anymore.

It may be more fruitful to draw on another image from Paul—and Jesus—that of the family. Families are “bodies” or organisms into which we are born without choice or input. And once a member of a family, we cannot truly remove ourselves, no matter how hard we may try to distance ourselves, emotionally, legally, or otherwise. Our connection to our family is quite literally written into our DNA. We cannot totally separate ourselves from it. In the long run, we are better off learning how to live in peace and love with our siblings, for we are bound together in an economy, a unity, that was established before us and that we are called to maintain.

Another fruitful image might be the Nguni Bantu concept of *ubuntu*, which was popularized by Bishop Desmond Tutu and others during the work of transitioning South Africa from apartheid to democracy. Bishop Tutu describes *ubuntu* this way:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, “*Yu, u nobuntu*”; “Hey, so-and-so has *ubuntu*.” Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.” We belong in a bundle of life. We say, “A person is a person through other persons.” It is not, “I think therefore I am.” It says rather: “I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.” A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

—Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*
(New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[21st Century Worship Resources for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time\)](#)

[The Great Thanksgiving for the Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time, or Kingdomtide\)](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Back to School Resources](#)

[Hiroshima and Nagasaki Memorial Observance Worship and Prayer Resources](#)

(August 6 and August 9)

[Hispanic Heritage Month September 15-October 15](#)

[A Service of Holy Communion for Labor Day](#) (September 3)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads — Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

FROM WORSHIP TO DISCIPLESHIP

Adult Resource

Introduction to Series:

This resource is meant to complement the worship resources for August 2018 ...in Love.

Faith Formation Groups

The name “formation groups” is intentional. These groups have a specific weekly focus; they emphasize growth in the formation of Christian character. The role of the group leader is not to be the “answer” person or the person with the most biblical knowledge. Often, it is more important that a good facilitator be able to help the groups ask the right questions than to provide the exact answers. Facilitators should familiarize themselves with the format, questions, possible answers, and background information ahead of time.

Groups should consist of six to eight people. If there are more participants than eight, consider adding more time for the group to meet and/or more groups. Each person that is added to the group will create more relationship dynamics to be managed, and each person might not have enough time to share. It is also highly advisable to use a group covenant that will give guidance to expectations of the participants’ roles and manners of speech. Specific items to include should be confidentiality, speaking only for oneself, and a willingness to risk sharing perspectives, no matter how popular or unpopular.

Another factor to consider is space. If your group meets in a church building, be sure the chairs for the group are soft and the group is set up in a circle. Use one table for food only. If meeting in a home, make sure there are plenty of seating areas and that distractions, such as pets, are appropriately tended to. If your group is meeting in a coffee shop or restaurant, be sure the space will be both comfortable and quiet enough for conversation.

Introduction to the Format

There is a pattern for each week. The times are suggestions and are loosely based on an hour timeframe. The times should be modified as needed. Each session will consist of the following elements:

Fellowship (Snacks or a Meal; 10 minutes with snacks; longer obviously, if there is a meal)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) — Each session will begin with an opening exercise to foster dialogue and help the participants settle in to the theme for the week.

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes) —This guide does not include a multitude of questions. The intent is for greater time to be spent on certain questions. During the dialogue sections, you will see guidance and possible answers to the given questions with brackets []. These are only possible answers and are not meant to be exhaustive of other answers. Questions that begin with **(R)** are meant to be more reflective. This means more time should be spent on these questions relative to others and will often result in participants needing more time to process. It is a helpful practice to allow participants plenty of time to internally process these questions. Don't be afraid of silence.

Prayer (10 minutes)—Allow each participant who would like to do so to lift up a person or situation he or she would like the group to be in prayer over. Following each request, the leader will pray, “Lord, in your mercy...”; and the participants will respond, “Hear our prayers.” If the situation is warranted and the participant is willing, surround the participant as a group to lay hands on him/her and allow those who are willing to pray for this person and/or situation.

Sending Forth (1 minute)—Ask for a volunteer to send the group out with the printed blessing or read the prayer in unison.

Week 1 — Build up...in Love

[Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

Fellowship (Snacks or a Meal; 10 minutes with snacks; longer obviously, if there is a meal)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) — In pairs, discuss: “What are you hoping to gain by being part of this faith formation group?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes)

Opening question: Name one example of the most mature Christian man or woman you have encountered.

Read: Ephesians 4:1-16 [It would be good to have several readers each take about four verses.]

- How do the qualities (humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love, maintain unity, peace) in verses 2 and 3 help us to live “a life worthy of the calling”?
- What are the purpose of the gifts (v. 11 — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) Christ has given to the church? [equipping for the work of ministry, building up the church, for unity, maturity, v. 12-13]
- It is not uncommon for people to either enjoy or recoil from “speaking the truth in love.” Which person are you? What’s the difference between “speaking the truth in love” and just being a jerk? What are the two purposes of “speaking the truth in love” that Paul identifies? [maturity or “grow up” in verse 15 and the church’s growth in verse 16]
- (R)** What does it look like for a person to become mature in Christ (or grow into “the measure of the full stature of Christ,” v.13)? [See note below for help.]
- What would it look like for a church to be built up in love (v. 16)?
- How can this group (or others) help you be built up in love?
- What are some ways that you can build others up in love (at church, home, work)?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Biblical

A form of the word “call” is used twice in the opening verse. The way the word “call” is used here by Paul indicates that God is inviting us to live in response to what God has already done in Christ and what God is continuing to do in working for the redemption of all things. As baptized Christians, our identity is wrapped up in following Christ. As baptized Christians, our purpose is to love God and love neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28).

Our identity, purpose, and calling means at least two things. First, God is always about the work of fitting the people of God for heaven (see maturity below). Second, how we live into our calling matters. We have the dignity of causality.

C. S. Lewis masterfully observes the effects of Christians living out of their identity and purpose. In a letter addressing why praying matters, building on the philosopher Blaise Pascal, Lewis talks about how God had constructed the world so that our prayers and

actions have the “the dignity of causality” (C.S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, New York: Harcourt, Harvest Books, pp 8-9). Our prayers and actions influence what happens in the world.

When we live out of our identity and purpose, other people are encouraged, blessed, challenged, and built up in love. As we learn to love God more deeply and love our neighbors more compassionately, our lives will naturally be attractive to others and be a sign of God’s work in us and in the world.

Theological

Maturity

It is one of our foundational beliefs—that “by grace you have been saved through faith,” as Paul writes earlier in this letter (2:8). As Methodists, we wholeheartedly affirm this belief and also insist that the good news does not end there. God is constantly working within us to fit us for abundant living or Christian maturity. One of the ways our founder, John Wesley, spoke of this work is in the metaphor of the “new life.” This metaphor emphasizes that God not only forgives us, God also desires we grow in abundant living or holiness (built up in love). Another image for this is that God’s love is expanding our capacity to love God and love others through acts of compassion. So while Methodists might not use terms like “saved” or “being saved” as often as other denominations, it is not that we disagree with those terms. Rather, those are starting points for living the new life God has for us, as we mature into more fully seasoned disciples of Jesus Christ.

Prayer (10 minutes)

Sending Forth (1 minute)—As a maturing disciple of Jesus Christ, go with the eyes of compassion, looking to share and spread the love of God in all the ways and places you can this week.

Children’s Messages for Worship

This resource may also be used in a midweek ministry or family devotions.

by Rev. Rosanna Anderson, Associate Director of Intergenerational Ministries Discipleship Ministries, The United Methodist Church

Week 1: August 5	Build Up... In Love	Ephesians 4:1-16
Week 2: August 12	Live... In Love	Ephesians 4:25-5:2
Week 3: August 19	Give Thanks... In Love	Ephesians 5:15-20

Week 4: August 26

Move... In Love

[Ephesians 6:10-20](#)

Introduce Paul and Ephesians

The apostle Paul was a teacher and pastor in the time after Jesus returned to heaven. Paul went to different cities and told people that Jesus is the Messiah whom God raised from the dead! Paul started many churches. Church leaders wrote him letters, asking questions about what they should do. Paul prayed and listened closely to what God told him. He wrote letters to guide the church as a community of faith in Jesus. Paul's letters on how to live as a Christian became part of the Bible in the New Testament. These letters help us to grow as disciples today.

Ephesians is a letter to the church in Ephesus, a big port city in Turkey where many people worshiped other gods.

Intergenerational: For Children's Moment or Family Devotions

To use these lessons in other settings, give children opportunities to respond or reflect through activities such as art and craft projects.

Ephesians 4:1-16

Ephesians 4:1-16, NRSV: 1 "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love**, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' 9 (When it says, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) 11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom

the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."

Introduce Paul and Ephesians

The apostle Paul was a teacher and pastor in the time after Jesus returned to heaven. Paul went to different cities and told people that Jesus is the Messiah whom God raised from the dead! Paul started many churches. Church leaders wrote him letters, asking questions about what they should do. Paul prayed and listened closely to what God told him. He wrote letters to guide the church as a community of faith in Jesus. Paul's letters on how to live as a Christian became part of the Bible in the New Testament. These letters help us to grow as disciples today. Ephesians is a letter to the church in Ephesus, a big port city in Turkey where many people worshiped other gods.

Our verse for today is Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 2. We are to live "**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.**"

Let's think about what this means:

Humility is humbleness. To be humble is to not be proud. Let another person go before you.

Gentleness is like peace. To be gentle is to talk softly or to reach out to touch softly.

Patience is waiting quietly. A patient person gives others plenty of time, even if it seems long.

To bear with one another in love means to not fuss or hurry, to be calm and kind.

Can you think of some ways that these qualities could help a family as they get ready to leave home in the morning?

What kinds of things could a child say or do to be humble, gentle, and patient?

What kinds of things could a parent say or do to be humble, gentle, and patient?

(Suggestions may include saying, "Here, you go first," or "Let's take turns," or "I can help with that." Affirm the responses. Add other suggestions as you feel led.)

These would be good ways to start the day.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for always being gentle, patient, and loving to us. Please help us to remember that the people in our life are much more important than things or tasks.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit who is working in our hearts to help us to grow more like Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

...IN LOVE
LIVE
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
August 12, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Lectionnaire en français, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/le-lectionnaire-oecumenique-revise>

Calendar Notes

August

All Month [Back to School Resources](#)

August 5 **August Worship Series Begins: "...In Love"**

September

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September

All Month [Season of Creation](#) (2018 series coming soon)

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October 15 [Hispanic Heritage Month \(USA\)](#)

October

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Planning for This Series

Today is the continuation of the new four-week series. We are following the Ephesians passages in the lectionary. You can do this series in the month of August, as originally planned, or you can place this anywhere in the year that you may need a four week worship series.

Paul's writing asserts that Christians are created to live in community with one another. This requires a certain level of spiritual maturity that we can reach only when we act toward one another in the spirit of Christian love. Hence the names for our series: ...in Love. Each week, we will focus on the text and how Paul instructs us to act. The first week, we must "Build Up One Another in Love." The second week, we are called to "Live in Love." The third week, we must "Give Thanks in Love." The fourth week is a sending text: it is not about life in the Christian community, but about putting on the armor of God so that we may go out into the world with a gospel message of love. You may consider a commissioning of some kind on this last week. If school is starting in your area, commission the teachers in your congregation. If confirmation classes are getting underway, commission the teachers and the students. Perhaps organize an all-church service project at the end of the month.

Some churches do their fall kick-off in the month of August. Consider using the small-group and children's resources in tandem with the worship pieces to focus your church on their life as a Christian community.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week's Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

There's a Spirit of Love in This Place

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3148
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 60-64 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano, organ, band, or rhythm section

Notes: This song by Mark Miller would make a great theme song for the entire "...In Love" series. Singing this work would be fitting at any point during the worship service, but it would be especially poignant as the last song of an opening worship set to put the language of love and peace on the mouths of the gathered community near the beginning of the service.

Resources: [Hymn Study](#)

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2223

Recommended Key: Em–Fm

Tempo: 92-136 bpm (quarter note)

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, solo guitar, strings, or any band ensemble (rock, jazz, etc.)

Notes: Another option for a theme song for the series, I would wager this is one of the most widely sung works across worship styles throughout the church. The unity expressed in the text and the immediately recognizable tune make this a congregational favorite, even across generational lines. As indicated in the tempo suggestion above, it is possible to sing this in a variety of ways, whether slow or fast, and across genres. Experiment with the accompaniment, and be encouraged to sing boldly!

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 384

Recommended Key: BEECHER: Bb; HYFRYDOL: F; HOLY MANNA: G

Tempo: Varies, depending on tune

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, instrumental ensemble

Notes: "Love Divine" is a classic example of Wesleyan hymnody that embraces the Methodist spirit. The stanzas of this hymn included in *The United Methodist Hymnal* outline the Wesleyan way of salvation, highlighting prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, and the dramatic conclusion of Christian perfection ("Lost in wonder, love, and praise"). Although BEECHER is the tune provided, many congregations sing this hymn to different tunes, with the most prominent alternate setting being HYFRYDOL. Other 87.87 D tunes will work, and it may depend on the dynamic

of worship in your setting. Sing this hymn often, and claim it as a vital part of the identity of Methodism!

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[FUSION tune by Jackson Henry](#)

[Simplified accompaniment](#)

O How He Loves You and Me

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2108

Recommended Key: Ab

Tempo: 76-80 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, guitar, or band

Notes: This hymn is characterized by long, lyrical phrases that yearn to be savored. Therefore, be sure not to sing too quickly. In this case, the tempo can be a vital part of creating an atmosphere of reverence and solemnity. Each phrase should be shaped within the arc of the entire stanza (meaning, the climactic phrase is the third phrase, so the first and second phrases should dynamically lead to that point). This hymn is appropriate for Holy Week or any time there is a focus upon the love of Jesus Christ.

Take My Life, and Let It Be

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 399

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 92-96 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Many congregations will be familiar with this hymn, which speaks of offering our lives to God. The primary concern for congregational singing here is to make sure a tempo is chosen in which the average congregation member can sing four measures in one breath. Dividing into two-measure phrases makes the melody too choppy, which can become a hindrance to the musical line. The text is dramatic, as shown in this progression of offerings to God:

- Take my life
- Take my moments and my days
- Take my hands
- Take my feet
- Take my voice
- Take my lips

- Take my silver and my gold
- Take my intellect
- Take my will
- Take my heart
- Take my love
- Take myself

These offerings very closely resemble the sentiment of the “Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition,” which begins, “I am no longer my own, but thine.”

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)
[Lead Sheet](#)

Woke Up This Morning

Source: *Songs of Zion*, 146; *The Faith We Sing*, 2082
 Recommended Key: F
 Tempo: 104-110 bpm
 Instrumentation: A cappella; piano, if needed
 Notes: Since this song is a spiritual, the ideal setting is for a congregation to sing a cappella, but an improvised piano accompaniment may also be fitting for some contexts. “Living in love” is a theme that is especially prominent in stanzas after the first: “Can’t hate your neighbor,” “Makes you love everybody,” etc. Insert claps on beats 2 and 4 only.

I Love You, Lord

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2068; *Zion Still Sings*, 40
 Recommended Key: F
 Tempo: 66-70 bpm
 Instrumentation: Piano, guitar, band, or organ
 Notes: “I Love You, Lord” is a classic example of praise and worship music from the 1970s, and this song has enough staying power to be relevant today as a song of prayer and devotion. The song leader might be tempted to close her/his eyes as this is sung, but I encourage giving attention to visually connecting with the congregation, especially to help cue breaths and entrances after such long notes in this slow tempo.

This Is Living

Source: CCLI, [7032393](#)

Recommended Key: G-A
Tempo: 120 (eighth note)
Instrumentation: Band, guitar, or piano
Notes: This modern song from Hillsong points toward emotions that often follow what we refer to as regeneration, or the new birth. The result is a new way of living. Although this work might not be the best choice for a congregational song, it might be a great option for a young soloist or ensemble. The primary reason I have included a tempo based upon an eighth note is because the recording of this song clearly points to the eighth note as the agogic (primary) beat.

PREACHING NOTES

We like maps. We like to be able to see a plan. We like to know how to get from here to there. Even the stereotypical male who doesn't like to stop to ask for directions still likes a map. He wants to know the plan; he just doesn't want to ask for help to get the plan.

For Christians, our map begins in baptism. Recall the references to baptism in last week's passage, both indirectly by way of the quotation from a baptismal liturgy and directly by way of the reference to our "one baptism" (in fact, there are references to baptism throughout Ephesians). This week, the author brings baptism to mind by noting that we are "marked with a seal" (v. 30). This leads into the following two verses in which the author carries forward the old-self/new-self language of 4:17–24, language that refers to baptism because the baptizand were believed to "put away" the old self by dying with Christ upon entering the water and then quite literally "put on" a new self as they emerged from the water and were clothed in a white robe, the "garment of Christ."

In today's passage, the old self that we are to put away is marked by bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice. Notice that all these things intend to work like a suit of armor (we should hear portents of the passage for our last week here!) to protect or insulate the self from harm. And all of these things are marks of unhealthy communication.

Conversely, the new self that we are to "put on" (though this language is not explicitly used here, following 4:17–24, it would be implied by way of contrast) is marked by kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. That which characterizes the new self should remind us of that which characterizes building up in love (humility, gentleness, and patience/forbearance) from last week's passage. Note how we are to speak truth to our neighbors, but truth alone is not enough. We are to speak only what is useful for building up. The truth must give grace to those who hear—in Wesleyan terms, it must be a channel or means of grace! All these characteristics nurture community/communion. And all of these things are marks of healthy communication. As

in last week's passage, the map for the new self, for living in love, that the author of Ephesians lifts up here is not about law—natural, moral, or otherwise—but about building up community.

This week's passage comes to a climax with the imperative "be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love." Here we return full circle to the image, if not the language, of "calling" from the beginning of chapter four, as well as from 1:4–18. Calls to imitate Christ are common the New Testament, but calls to imitate God are rare (though there is some hint in that direction in Mt 5:44–48), and the rarity of such a call should capture our attention.

The language of imitation can be dangerous. Even in today's passage, which calls us to imitate God, that imitation is directly linked to living like Christ who gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice. From the perspective of much contemporary theology, we occupy a very precarious position here, for we appear to stand on the brink of the glorification of suffering for its own sake. For centuries, the glorification of suffering and the admonishment to imitate Christ and be conformed to him, to his sufferings, and to his self-sacrificial love has been used to justify the suffering and oppression of generations based on the idea that suffering has salvific meaning in and of itself. Feminist and womanist theologies, in particular, have been right to point out that a theology that spiritualizes suffering supports victimization and abuse. Moreover, many feminists and womanists believe that language such as this passage can easily lead to the kind of abuse that ends in the destruction of the self. This is, perhaps, most often the case because Christ's "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" is often identified solely with the crucifixion. Are we, then, to allow ourselves to be subjected to suffering as Christ was? To put it another way: If it was Christ's desire to demonstrate his affirmation of the will of God by his willingness to be persecuted even to the point of death, and we are to imitate Christ, are we, then, to imitate him by our own willingness to be persecuted, even to the point of death?

Several things are important to keep in mind here.

First, as Robert J. Daly warns, "to project our human and thus inevitably flawed (at least inevitably finite) juridical thinking...onto God, and then to take the resulting image of God as a model both for understanding God's actions and for us humans to imitate, is simply bad theology."^[1]

Second, there are some things that only God can do in the way that God can do them to get the results that God gets. Take, as one example, the Incarnation, in which God is united with humanity in Christ. While the goal of all humanity is union with God, and we are to imitate Christ, we certainly can't imitate the Incarnation. Our union is categorically different, and therefore the character of our imitation will be categorically different.

Third, the language of sacrifice here is, in the context of the epistle, reminiscent of 2:13 where the author mentions the blood of Christ. But 2:13 is suggestive of the

peace offering with which Moses sealed the covenant (“those who were once far off are brought near”), not the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement.

Finally, if we are to be imitators of God, then we cannot disregard the fact that God, as Trinity, is constituted by loving relationship and thus exists in community, which includes the Father, who forgives in order to restore right relationship, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life.

Rather, we might see this call to imitate God as a restatement of the Great Commandment. As children, our love is not simply to be directed to God, but, as imitators of God, toward others, too. The verse immediately preceding the call to imitate calls us to forgive one another as God has forgiven us, an injunction that might bring to mind the song “Freely, Freely” (UMH 389):

God forgave my sins in Jesus' name,
I've been born again in Jesus' name,
And in Jesus' name I come to you,
To share his love as he told me to.

He said, “Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give.”

Even more poignantly, however, “forgive as God has forgiven” might better be stated, based on the Greek (*charizomai*), as “be gracious as God was gracious.” Forgiveness is a discrete act, elicited in the face of (and as a response to) a particular offence. Graciousness, in keeping with this week’s theme of living in love, is a way of being, of walking. In Wesleyan terms, we are called to a life marked by works of grace and mercy.

If forgiveness is the imitation of God, kindness is the virtue, not holiness or righteousness. Indeed, righteousness and holiness are the climax of the passage immediately preceding this one (v. 24), but they are what constitute the likeness (image) in which we were created, not the way in which we are to walk. The way back to this likeness is the way of love. As with last week’s passage, if a great part of the law is dedicated to explicating what constitutes holiness, a great part of the gospel is dedicated to explicating what constitutes love. That which is required of us, the manner in which we are required to walk in imitation of God, cannot be separated from the way in which God has acted toward us in Christ Jesus. German offers wonderful play on words in this regard in which all the moral requirements (*Aufgabe*) in the New Testament are grounded in what God has done for the world in Christ (*Gabe*). The focus is on the actions of God (love) rather than on God’s natural state of being (holiness).

In considering the call to live in love, it is important to remember that Ephesians is addressed to those who already claim to be Christian—and, more importantly, to two

factions that, though they have very different views, have been united in one body. These are the hostilities Christ has reconciled, and the church will be the first to be judged by the ethic of love and abundance God has made known in Christ (cf. 2:14–22). If the Incarnation really is the basis for our reconciliation, and therefore the paradigm by which we are to understand the task of reconciliation, then the union/reconciliation must be, in some way, irreversible and inescapable.

We are “members of one another.” The call to live in love is a common theme of last week and this week, as is the call to build up. This is no disembodied, conceptual exhortation. It is, rather, an injunction to an embodied, incarnate response. We are called to live and love, literally to walk, as Christ lived, loved, and walked. Conformity to Christ (to be formed with) does not mean uniformity (one form). There are many paths, just as there are many gifts. In a sense, Paul is not giving us a map, a path to holiness and righteousness, which, once we know the way, we can simply apply it to our lives; rather, Paul is telling us the way to walk, no matter the path. This is a way of being, of participation rather than application, a way of living in love.

[1] Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 108.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[21st Century Worship Resources for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/i-am-forest-green)
[“I Am” \(hymn\), <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/i-am-forest-green>](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/i-am-forest-green)
[Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time\)](#)
[The Great Thanksgiving for the Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time, or Kingdomtide\)](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Back to School Resources](#)
[Hispanic Heritage Month September 15-October 15](#)
[A Service of Holy Communion for Labor Day](#) (September 3)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads — Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

FROM WORSHIP TO DISCIPLESHIP

Adult

[Ephesians 4:25-5:2](#)

Fellowship (Snacks or a Meal; 10 minutes with snacks; longer obviously, if there is a meal)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) — In pairs or groups of three, discuss:
“Name a person you would want to imitate. Why did you choose that person?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes)

Opening Question: If you could change one bad habit right now, what would it be and why?

Read: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

- Paul gives a laundry list of items mature Christians are to “put away” (v. 25-31). Though not intended to be an exhaustive list, Paul is offering ways for these growing Christians to imitate Christ and live in “true righteousness and holiness” (v. 24). While we do not earn our salvation by good works, we are called to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). At the very least then, this means that in order to grow in Christian maturity, there must be intentionality and change in our habits. (See “Biblical Background” for more clarification.) Where are you feeling God’s call to “put away” certain habits or attitudes?
- What do you think it looks to “be imitators of God” (5:1-2)?
- (R)** What might it look like for you to be an “imitator of God” within your closest relationships (spouse, children, friends, co-workers, etc.)?
- How might this group help you live into being an “imitator of God” more fully?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Biblical

Throughout Christian history, there have been two tendencies that present different pitfalls for Christian maturity. The first is *legalism*. We might define this tendency as attempting to keep all the rules without the power of the Holy Spirit. The second tendency could be labeled *permissiveness*. This is the tendency to focus on freedom to follow the Holy Spirit without disciplined discipleship. When Paul advocates

that we imitate God (5:1), he invites us into a healthy discipleship that avoids these two tendencies. Earlier in Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (3:16-17), we read, "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love."

Growing in Christian discipleship requires that we put away tendencies, habits, and attitudes that are contrary to the gospel as well as take on new postures that open us to the power of God's grace (holy habits, prayer, Scripture reading, etc.). It is through these new postures and habits that we become—what is seemingly impossible—imitators of God for others, thus fulfilling the Greatest Commandment to love God and our neighbors.

Theological

Unity (Catholic Spirit?)

The use of the phrase "one body" in relation to the church seems at odds in a society where there are tens of thousands of denominations. "How do we relate with Christians from other denominations?" is a question that comes up from time to time. Often, this is a question of boundaries: Who is in our group (Christian)? Who is not? As Methodists, we draw a boundary that is more inclusive than some other denominations. It is not unusual for Methodist pastors to affiliate with local ecumenical groups. We do not (re)baptize new members who have been baptized in other Christian denominations. Our founder, John Wesley, taught on what he called the "Catholic Spirit." This was not referring to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the use of "catholic," meaning "universal." Even though we come from other denominations, we recognize that there is one faith, one baptism, and one Lord.

Sending Forth (2 minutes) End by praying the Wesley Covenant Prayer together:

"I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,

let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.”

Intergenerational

Ephesians 4:25-5:2, NRSV: 25 “So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. 28 Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. **29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.** 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Introduce Paul and Ephesians

The apostle Paul was a teacher and pastor in the time after Jesus returned to heaven. Paul went to different cities and told people that Jesus is the Messiah whom God raised from the dead! Paul started many churches. Church leaders wrote him letters, asking questions about what they should do. Paul prayed and listened closely to what God told him. He wrote letters to guide the church as a community of faith in Jesus. Paul's letters on how to live as a Christian became part of the Bible in the New Testament. These letters help us to grow as disciples today. Ephesians is a letter to the church in Ephesus, a big port city in Turkey where many people worshiped other gods.

Our verse for today is Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 29. **“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”**

Let's think about what this means:

We are to say just what helps to build up other people. We are not to use words that tear down.

We are to show kindness through the things we say to people and about people.

Our words should give grace to those who hear us. Grace is forgiveness and mercy.

When we speak with grace, we do not make the other person feel bad or sad.

Can you think of some ways that these qualities could help in this situation? Two children are playing on the playground, but they are pushing and arguing over who goes first on the slide.

What kinds of things could the child who was pushed say or do to build up and give grace?

What kinds of things could the child who did the pushing say or do to build up and give grace?

(Suggestions may include saying, "Let's not fight," or "Let's be friends," or "I'm sorry," or "I forgive you." Affirm the responses. Add other suggestions as you feel led.)

These would be good ways to speak on the playground.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for speaking your gracious word of life. You have forgiven us more times than we can count. Please help us to share your grace with others. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit who helps us to be tenderhearted like Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

...IN LOVE
GIVE THANKS
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
August 19, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
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[Veteran's Day \(USA\)](#)

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Planning for This Series

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Paul's writing asserts that Christians are created to live in community with one another. This requires a certain level of spiritual maturity that we can reach only when we act toward one another in the spirit of Christian love. Hence the names for our series: ...in Love. Each week, we will focus on the text and how Paul instructs us to act. The first week, we must "Build Up One Another in Love." The second week, we are called to "Live in Love." The third week, we must "Give Thanks in Love." The fourth week is a sending text: it is not about life in the Christian community, but about putting on the armor of God so that we may go out into the world with a gospel message of love. You may consider a commissioning of some kind on this last week. If school is starting in your area, commission the teachers in your congregation. If confirmation classes are getting underway, commission the teachers and the students. Perhaps organize an all-church service project at the end of the month.

Some churches do their fall kick-off in the month of August. Consider using the small-group and children's resources in tandem with the worship pieces to focus your church on their life as a Christian community.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week's Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

There's a Spirit of Love in This Place

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3148
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 60-64 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano, organ, band, or rhythm section
Notes: This song by Mark Miller would make a great theme song for the entire "...In Love" series. Singing this work would be fitting at any point during the worship service, but it would be

especially poignant as the last song of an opening worship set to put the language of love and peace on the mouths of the gathered community near the beginning of the service.

Resources: [Hymn Study](#)

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2223

Recommended Key: Em–Fm

Tempo: 92-136 bpm (quarter note)

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, solo guitar, strings, or any band ensemble (rock, jazz, etc.)

Notes: Another option for a theme song for the series, I would wager this is one of the most widely sung works across worship styles throughout the church. The unity expressed in the text and the immediately recognizable tune make this a congregational favorite, even across generational lines. As indicated in the tempo suggestion above, it is possible to sing this in a variety of ways, whether slow or fast, and across genres. Experiment with the accompaniment, and be encouraged to sing boldly!

Give Thanks

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2036; *Zion Still Sings*, 127

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 108-112 bpm, although a slower tempo is possible

Instrumentation: Piano, band, guitar, or organ

Notes: "Give Thanks" is a well-known example of older praise and worship music that is considered both timeless and very singable for most, if not all, congregations. A variety of accompaniments are possible, so shape what is needed within your context. The tempo listed above is suggested for an upbeat singing, although a more reflective, slower tempo is also possible for different contexts.

In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2195

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 66 bpm

Instrumentation: Guitar, organ, piano, other accompanying instruments

Notes: This song from the Taizé Community in France allows for a

voice of thankfulness to be offered in a repetitive, cyclic prayer. Parts for a variety of instruments can be found in the accompaniment edition of *The Faith We Sing*. Sing this chorus as a prayer for the day or even after the sermon or offering (or even during the offering) as a sung act of thanksgiving.

Let All Things Now Living

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2008
Recommended Key: F
Tempo: 108-112 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: THE ASH GROVE is the perfect tune for this hymn as a long enough musical setting to make this two-stanza hymn seem longer (which, in this case, is a good thing!). This hymn is appropriate in worship any time, but may be especially meaningful when celebrating the expansiveness of God's creation. Do not drag the tempo; keep it moving forward, but not so fast that the words and moving notes become difficult for the congregation.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Thank You, Lord

Source: *Songs of Zion*, 228; *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 84
Recommended Key: G
Tempo: 46-50 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano, organ, or band
Notes: This gospel chorus must be sung passionately at a slow pace. If using the setting from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, allow a choir to sing in 4-part harmony to accompany the congregation, and be sure to put space between "thank" and "you," as written by William Farley Smith, in measure 7. If you have a soloist who is confident with improvisation alongside the congregational singing, encourage her/him to sing a very short introduction every time before the congregation begins singing. Don't be afraid to use piano, organ, bass, and drums all at the same time to make the singing of this brief chorus authentic and full. This song is very accessible, however, to congregations of all sizes and abilities and should be considered for this act of

thanksgiving. The setting in *Songs of Zion* provides a different accompaniment that might also lead to some creative improvisation!

Resources: [Lead Sheet](#)

I Thank You, Jesus

Source: *Zion Still Sings*, 124; *Worship & Song*, 3037

Recommended Key: G

Tempo: 82-88 bpm (dotted quarter)

Instrumentation: Piano, organ, or rhythm section

Notes: This rousing hymn from *Zion Still Sings* and *Worship & Song* has quickly become a favorite in many congregations and serves as an effective expression of thanksgiving. The repeated text, "You brought me from a mighty long way," is a sung Ebenezer of sorts and echoes to numerous Scriptures of God's deliverance, including 1 Samuel 7:12 and 2 Samuel 7:18. Be sure not to sing this hymn too fast. Allow the music to swing, which can easily be done in this 12/8 meter. Any number of instruments can accompany this selection, including organ, piano, drums, bass, and electric guitar.

Resources: [Hymn Study](#)

When Words Alone Cannot Express

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3012

Recommended Key: Eb

Tempo: 72-76 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: This brilliant text by John Thornburg channels the spirit of Fred Pratt Green (author of "When In Our Music God Is Glorified") in a rousing hymn of praise and thanksgiving, even in the midst of trying circumstances and adversity. This hymn has the ability to express the joy and pain of the human condition and our need to give thanks through it all.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

PREACHING NOTES

"Understand what the will of the Lord is." This week's passage includes a tall order: to know the will of God. If only that were a simple task. We use this language frequently, but it is more often spoken in an effort to assure ourselves in the face of

doubt rather than spoken in confidence. If only we understood what God's will was. And yet, much like Jesus, our author "does not leave us orphaned" here. We have been told from the beginning God's will is to unite all things (1:10–11) in an economy of love (5:1–2) in which Christ has filled us with gifts of love so that being in and filled with the Spirit (2:22) we may walk in love (4:1–2; 5:2). Simple, right?

As if that weren't enough, however, this is complicated by the injunction to give thanks at all times and for everything. Thanksgiving, it seems, is the *sine qua non* of what it means to be a community of good communicators, the culmination of the argument running throughout Ephesians that transformed (and transformative) language is a hallmark of what it means to walk in love. The language of thanksgiving is to replace all obscene, silly, and vulgar talk (v. 4), for thanksgiving requires a posture that assumes gentleness, generosity, and openness. Thanksgiving is an act for the other, whether that other is God or our neighbor (cf. 1:16). And in an economy where God is over all and in all, bringing all things together, thanksgiving is a realization and embodiment of the very fullness of God that is endless abundance in the fullness of all things and time (1:10).

But can we really give thanks for all things at all times in a world that, though God may be gathering up (or has gathered up) all things in Christ, still hasn't fully realized that redemption? Must we forget all the brokenness in the world and simply give thanks to God for all that is? No. The call to give thanks is not a call to forget but, in fact, to remember. Part of what it means to be children of the light is to be attentive to what can be, even in the darkness.

The liturgy may offer an instructive model here. Historically, the prayers of the people occur immediately before the offering, which is, in turn, followed by the doxology. Our proclamation of the doxology is not an act of forgetting the petitions we've just made, but rather a response to it. We respond to the needs of the world by bringing forth our gifts, which we ask God to bless and use in order to meet the needs of the world. And we give thanks to God that God is still working in the world to meet those needs and that God has called us to join co-operatively in that work. We have not forgotten the brokenness of the world in our act of thanksgiving, but rather we must hold these two things in tension.

And so, we are led back to the liturgy. As we have already pointed out, Ephesians is replete with references to baptism, and though there is no specific reference to baptism in this passage, the verse immediately preceding this week's passage (v. 14) is most likely an excerpt from an early baptismal liturgy: "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!" And while baptism names us and claims us, liturgy shapes us, and it shapes us for thanksgiving (*eucharista*). And according to this week's passage, the fullest embodiment of that transformative communication as thanksgiving is singing.

This claim may seem odd at first, but perhaps less so if we think about the act of singing together. According to the passage, singing as an act of thanksgiving is corporate in nature. We are to sing among ourselves, addressing one another in song. When we sing, we resonate with one another. Singing may be the most desirable form of embodying transformed and transformative communication because we are not called to sing at someone, but sing with someone, to resonate. *To resonate* means literally *to sound again, to echo, to vibrate and move with*. Something cannot resonate simply by hearing or receiving sound; it must be open, be flexible enough to move, and then be animated in the act of sounding with. Participation in the realization of the fullness of God's abundance and purpose for humanity through a community of singing actually fosters loving alertness to one's neighbor (recall the concept of *ubuntu* from the first week's notes). This is, of course, highly contrasted with present-day attitudes toward music, which have relegated it to the purview of personal aesthetic, affording it little lasting or profound effect. Here, however, listening—consuming—is not adequate. We must open ourselves to be moved with the song and then to re-sound it, to echo it back. Only then, when we are of one sound, can we be of one mind, one Spirit, and one body (Phil 2:1–2; Col 3:14–16; Eph 4:4–6, 5:18–20). Singing together allows us to embody and to make present—to realize—the unity to which we are called.

Further, the concept of resonating brings attention to an important aspect of how singing achieves this unity. That is, singing has the distinguishing ability to strike a balance between the individual and the community. On the one hand, singing is the act of an individual. It is an act of personal expression, and it is an act of the whole being, at that: mental, emotional, physical, spirit and flesh. Singing both involves the whole self and reorients the whole self. Singing comes from the core of our being and moves outward toward the other.

On the other hand, that fact that singing is both interior and exterior enables it to value the individual's act of expression while also making room for the other. Though social in its nature, singing is a joining together of many *individual* voices—unity without uniformity. Singing together constantly invites others in while never giving rise to any sense of crowding out. Rather, it gives rise to a sense of abundance, of fullness, which constantly overflows, fostering ever-expanding boundaries. When we sing together, we must be attentive to and in harmony with the other. Recall Wesley's instruction in his directions for singing: "do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation that you may not destroy the harmony."^[1]

But this does not require the erasure or silencing of ourselves. Singing together builds up the other, but not at the expense of ourselves. We might say that singing together is not a zero-sum economy, where the gain of one means the loss of another. Rather, singing, in the words of David Ford, brings about "a new 'ecology' of power."^[2] Singing involves reaching outside oneself toward the other in a gesture which in its own vulnerability fosters loving *koinonia* and which in its ecstatic generosity fosters

eucharistic *perichoresis*. It is an outpouring of the self—a *kenosis*—which is not to be clutched (cf. Phil 2:6), but rather offered out in love to the other. Singing together creates an economy in which the community is harmonized together into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (2:18–22; the same word is used in Greek in both 2:21 and 5:19). We might say that, in this way, singing is modeled on and derivative of the way the Trinity itself is animated, and this would mean that in singing together, we resonate not only with others, but also with God, in eternal thanksgiving.

[1] UMH, vii.

[2] David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[21st Century Worship Resources for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time\)](#)

[I Will Give Thanks: A Setting of Psalm 111.](#)

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/i-will-give-thanks-a-setting-of-psalm-111>

[The Great Thanksgiving for the Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time, or Kingdomtide\)](#)

21st Century Africana Liturgy Resources for the Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/21st-century-africana-liturgy-resources-for-the-eleventh-sunday-after-1>

Seasonal/Secular

[Back to School Resources](#)

[Hispanic Heritage Month September 15-October 15](#)

[A Service of Holy Communion for Labor Day \(September 3\)](#)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads — Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

FROM WORSHIP TO DISCIPLESHIP

Adult

[Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

Fellowship (Snacks or a Meal; 10 minutes with snacks; longer obviously, if there is a meal)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) — In pairs or groups of three, discuss: “What are you most thankful for today?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes)

Opening Question: What image or images come to mind when you envision the Holy Spirit?

Read: Ephesians 5:15-30

- ❑ Paul advises us to be “filled with the [Holy] Spirit” in verse 18. How does being filled with the Holy Spirit relate to Paul’s other instructions to “be careful how we live” (v. 15) and “giving thanks to God the Father at all times...”? (see “Biblical Background” for help. Some answers could include that the Holy Spirit brings greater awareness of where we are falling short and empowers us to love God and neighbor. The Holy Spirit might also reveal to us more ways in which God is at work in our lives and in our world, which will result in a more thankful attitude.)
- ❑ What, then, might it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? (See “Biblical Background” for help.)
- ❑ How does being filled with the Holy Spirit relate to Paul’s earlier command to be “imitators of God” (5:1)?
- ❑ **(R)** What might it look like for you to grow in sanctifying grace?
- ❑ Optional question if time permits: How does Ephesians 5:1-21 inform how we read the “household code” Paul includes in Ephesians 5:22-6:9?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Biblical

A translation of verse 15 *could* read something like this, “Therefore, see how carefully you walk, not as unwise but as wise people.” While many translations (NIV, NRSV, and others) use the word “live” (in place of “walk”), the idea expressed here is about how we are walking, or journeying along, or even maturing as Christians growing in wisdom. Living a life of thankfulness is more than just the action of speaking words of thankfulness; it includes how we live in response to God’s grace.

Being filled with the Spirit can have a connotation of exuberance or religious excess for some people. However, since the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune God, and God’s nature is love, the fruit of being filled with the Spirit must ultimately result in love for God and neighbor. We also get a clearer picture of this in Paul’s other letter, Galatians, when he describes the fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Another^[1] ^[MU2] name for the Lord’s Supper or Communion is the Eucharist. The name comes from a Greek word meaning “give thanks.” A large section of *The United Methodist Hymnal*’s Communion liturgy is reserved for the Great Thanksgiving. The Great Thanksgiving section of the Communion liturgy reminds us of the mighty works God has done on our behalf. The next time you are able to take Communion, be sure to give thanks for what God has done!

Theological

Sanctification/Character of a Methodist

The word “sanctification” can be an intimidating word. It is, however, an important concept for Christians in general and Methodists in particular. From God in Leviticus calling the people of Israel to be “holy as I am holy” or Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew inviting the new community to be “perfect as your heavenly father is perfect,” sanctification is a consistent theme and calling for the people of God. *Sanctify* comes from the word “to make holy” or “be separated.” Our separation is not meant to convey the sense of being withdrawn as much as it is a calling of uniqueness. We are called to be the unique people of God. The Israelites were called to reflect the holy character of God, which would result in unique laws (like resting on the Sabbath) and even unique diet (not eating pork). The new community of Jesus’ disciples are similarly called to embody the unique way of Jesus (forgiveness, radical compassion, and selfless love). When John Wesley taught on sanctification, he was affirming God’s continual work of the Holy Spirit within us, confirming or shaping us into the image of Christ — the ultimate example of love.

Sending Forth (2 minutes)—As a maturing disciple of Jesus Christ, be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in love and be thankful always.

Intergenerational

Commented [MU1]: ????? Is there supposed to be a footnote. Or is this a typo?

Ephesians 5:15-20, NRSV: 5 "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you **sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts**, 20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Introduce Paul and Ephesians

The apostle Paul was a teacher and pastor in the time after Jesus returned to heaven. Paul went to different cities and told people that Jesus is the Messiah whom God raised from the dead! Paul started many churches. Church leaders wrote him letters, asking questions about what they should do. Paul prayed and listened closely to what God told him. He wrote letters to guide the church as a community of faith in Jesus. Paul's letters on how to live as a Christian became part of the Bible in the New Testament. These letters help us to grow as disciples today. Ephesians is a letter to the church in Ephesus, a big port city in Turkey where many people worshiped other gods.

Our verse for today is Ephesians 5, verse 19: "**sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

Let's think about what this means:

Sing among yourselves means to sing together with your family, friends, and the church.

To sing and make melody in your heart means to hum or sing when you are alone with God.

At any time or place, God is glad to hear our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Giving thanks to God at all times means to look for the good when we face a challenge. We give thanks to God in the name of Jesus, because he has power to bring good even out of a bad situation.

Can you think of some ways that this verse could help a family to wisely spend the time while they wait in a line that is moving slowly?

What kinds of things could a child say or do to sing, make melody, or give thanks?

What kinds of things could a parent say or do to sing, make melody, or give thanks?

(Suggestions may include singing, humming, or talking about being thankful when the line moves forward. Affirm the responses. Add other suggestions as you feel led.)

These would be good ways to spend the time in line.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for your gifts of music and songs we can sing by ourselves and with others. Please help us to seek your will at all times. Thank you for filling us with your Holy Spirit who inspires us to sing to you quietly or together. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**...IN LOVE
MOVE
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
August 26, 2018**

**PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes**

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Lectionnaire en français, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/le-lectionnaire-oeumenique-reviser>

Calendar Notes

August

All Month [Back to School Resources](#)

August 5 **August Worship Series Begins: "...In Love"**

September

All Month [Back to School Resources](#)

August 5 **August Worship Series Begins: "...In Love"**

September

All Month [Season of Creation](#) (2018 series coming soon)

September 3 [Labor Day \(USA\)](#)

September 15-

October 15 [Hispanic Heritage Month \(USA\)](#)

October

October 6 **October Series in Job** ([2018 Resources Forthcoming](#))

October 7 [World Communion Sunday](#)

October 14 [Children's Sabbath](#)

October 21 [Laitiy Sunday](#)

October 31 [Reformation Day](#)

November

November 1 [All Saints Day](#)

November 4 [All Saints Sunday](#)

[Daylight Saving Time Ends \(USA\)](#)

Dwellings ([2018 Resources Forthcoming](#))

November 11 [Organ and Tissue Donor Sunday](#)

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

[Veteran's Day \(USA\)](#)

Extended Advent Begins

November 18 Bible Sunday
November 18-25 National Bible Week (USA)
November 22 Thanksgiving Day (USA)
November 25 Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday
United Methodist Student Day (offering)

Planning for This Series

We are in the final week of the four-week series. We are following the Ephesians passages in the lectionary. You can do this series in the month of August, as originally planned, or you can place this anywhere in the year that you may need a four-week worship series.

Paul's writing asserts that Christians are created to live in community with one another. This requires a certain level of spiritual maturity that we can reach only when we act toward one another in the spirit of Christian love. Hence the names for our series: ...in Love. Each week, we have focused on the text and on how Paul instructs us to act. The first week was "Build Up One Another in Love." The second week, we saw that we are called to "Live in Love." The third week stressed that we must "Give Thanks in Love." The fourth week is a sending text: it is not about life in the Christian community, but about putting on the armor of God so that we may go out into the world with a gospel message of love. You may consider a commissioning of some kind on this last week. If school is starting in your area, commission the teachers in your congregation. If confirmation classes are getting underway, commission the teachers and the students. Perhaps organize an all-church service project at the end of the month.

Some churches do their fall kick-off in the month of August. Consider using the small-group and children's resources in tandem with the worship pieces to focus your church on their life as a Christian community.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week's Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

There's a Spirit of Love in This Place

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3148
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 60-64 bpm

Instrumentation: Piano, organ, band, or rhythm section
Notes: This song by Mark Miller would make a great theme song for the entire "...In Love" series. Singing this work would be fitting at any point during the worship service, but it would be especially poignant as the last song of an opening worship set to put the language of love and peace on the mouths of the gathered community near the beginning of the service.
Resources: [Hymn Study](#)

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2223
Recommended Key: Em–Fm
Tempo: 92-136 bpm (quarter note)
Instrumentation: Organ, piano, solo guitar, strings, or any band ensemble (rock, jazz, etc.)
Notes: Another option for a theme song for the series, I would wager this is one of the most widely sung works across worship styles throughout the church. The unity expressed in the text and the immediately recognizable tune make this a congregational favorite, even across generational lines. As indicated in the tempo suggestion above, it is possible to sing this in a variety of ways, whether slow or fast, and across genres. Experiment with the accompaniment, and be encouraged to sing boldly!

You've Got to Move

Source: *The Africana Hymnal*, 4077
Recommended Key: Bbm–Dm
Tempo: 84-88 bpm
Instrumentation: a cappella with hand claps
Notes: This short, rhythmic song is an example of a "ring shout," which is an African American tradition of singing that involved music, dancing, and shouting, all while standing in a ring. The melody of a song would be sung and improvised upon while drums were played, hands clapped, and feet shuffled to embody the ecstatic nature of the song. It is clear why it was selected for this Sunday, with the theme built upon the imperative, "Move." If you have the opportunity to consult the recording that comes with *The Africana Hymnal*, it will be helpful because it helps teach the performance

practice of the singing and clapping together. If the clapping as written on the score is too difficult for your congregation, it is also possible to proceed with other options:

Clap in a half-note pattern (the slower pattern on the recording) throughout on beats 1 and 3.

Have the congregation clap in a half-note pattern on beats 1 and 3 while the choir or a selected group claps the more syncopated pattern from the score.

For more information on a ring shout, be sure to watch the video, [Reflect, Reclaim, Rejoice: Preserving the Gift of Black Sacred Music](#) or read the small-group study of the same title.

Resources: [Reflect, Reclaim, Rejoice: Preserving the Gift of Black Sacred Music](#)

Be Thou My Vision

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 451

Recommended Key: Eb

Tempo: 84-92 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, guitar, or band

Notes: This hymn is well known and should be accessible to a variety of worship settings, regardless of style. The tune is very lyrical and idiomatic of Irish folk music. The addition of flute, recorder, or tin whistle might be appropriate, as well as a pulsing hand drum.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)
[Alternate accompaniment](#)
[Choral Introit](#)

Go Forth for God

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 670

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 112-120 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: This stately hymn presents a bold, yet loving approach to going into the world with “the armor of God.” Keep the tempo quick enough that it is inspiring for people as they leave and not so slow and heavy as to become a dirge. Slowing down

the last stanza would be appropriate, but be sure it is still enough to encourage people to move confidently from worship into the community.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Lead On, O King Eternal

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 580; *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 174

Recommended Key: C or Db

Tempo: 108-112 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: This familiar hymn and tune is very accessible and singable in most settings. Many organists and pianists, however, shy away from playing in 5 flats (the key of Db), so an accompaniment in C can also be found at No. 571 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Keep the tempo moving forward! A descant and alternate harmonization can be found within *The United Methodist Hymnal Music Supplement*.

May You Run and Not Be Weary

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2281

Recommended Key: G

Tempo: 100-104 bpm

Instrumentation: Piano, guitar, or band

Notes: This short chorus is appropriate at the end of a worship service as a closing song of sending. If the congregation is unfamiliar with it, make it a choral benediction to help the gathered body learn it. Then sing it for a few weeks to help commit it to memory! Regardless of how it is presented, make sure it is not too rigid. The tempo and rhythms should feel relaxed.

PREACHING NOTES

The end of summer is for many of us—in our families, our schools, and our churches—a time of preparation as we get ready for the start of a new year (despite the fact the neither the calendar year nor the liturgical year begins in September!). Like the end of summer, this week's passage marks an important conclusion and a call to preparation: as a rhetorical peroration, it serves as both the concluding summary of the author's argument and a rousing call to action.

We are roused to action by the call to put on the whole armor of God (vv. 14–17). That donning armor was preparatory for going into battle notwithstanding, the very way in which this armor is described indicates that it is to prepare us for the work to which we have been called. For example, a soldier was able to secure the loose fabric of his tunic with his belt so that it would not become a hindrance or danger in battle, so the donning of a belt was a signal that one was ready to enter battle. And the shoes with which we are instructed to put on our feet are shoes for mission, for going out. Even the breastplate of righteousness draws on a reference from Isaiah 59:17 in which, after observing grave injustice among the people and seeing that no one else is responding, God prepares to respond by donning the breastplate of righteousness. And standing itself—mentioned four times in this short passage—isn't passive, but rather signals the resolve to stay in battle rather than to flee in a Greek military context and the readying of a phalanx of soldiers in a Roman military context.

We have already, in the passage from our first week of this series (4:1–16), discussed the need to read critically against the historical structures, culture, and language of the Roman Empire. Evoking this language can be dangerous, as it has been used for centuries to justify oppression of—and aggression toward—the “other.” Military imagery, consecrated by the “Holy” Roman Empire and grounded in the concept of the *Pax Romana*, has been used to rationalize countless atrocities and wars. It is important, therefore, to hold this language carefully and to consciously and intentionally destabilize it, and our author gives us several handholds with which to do so.

First, the imperial stance of the soldier is literally undermined by feet shod for the gospel of peace—a peace which the author makes very clear has been brought about in a very different way from the *Pax Romana*. This is not a soldier standing ready for military battle, but standing ready to go out to preach the gospel.

Second, the passage from Isaiah 59, which serves as one of the primary sources for this imagery, includes references to God putting on garments of vengeance and fury as a mantle (59:17), images that are omitted in Ephesians. Even in appropriating the biblical imagery, the author is “rewriting the grammar” of the “whole” armor of God by these omissions.

Third, the language of “putting on” the armor of God evokes the baptismal language (again!) of putting on the new self (there is a direct textual link in the Greek to 4:24), a self which is created in the likeness of God and marked by love and unity. Thus, the language of “all,” which could be conflated with the oppressive and coercive “all” of the *Pax Romana*, is balanced with gentleness, patience, and forbearance, the marks of the non-coercive ethic of Ephesians.

Even in terms of summarizing the epistle's argument, the author uses the passage to undermine this imagery. The whole armor of God is put on in this case, not for protection as in 4:31 (recall the second week's notes), but rather for good communication! Almost every element of the armor is geared toward communication:

truth, righteousness (right relationship), proclamation, faith (*kerygma*), word. The whole metaphor of armor is inverted. Instead of something that is designed to protect the bearer, the armor of God is something that is designed to engage the bearer with the one he/she encounters. In fact, the reference to the gospel of peace (v. 15) draws on Isaiah 52:7, in which the one who bears the gospel of peace is a messenger.

Moreover, the whole movement of the description of the armor of God (vv. 14–17) points toward embodiment in joint prayer (v. 18). The structure of the passage, in fact, could suggest that we are to put on the armor with prayer; or, more intriguingly, that it's plausible to consider prayer as another piece of the armor, as grammatically the "prayer and supplication" of v. 18 could relate back to the "stand firm" of v. 14. Either way, the passage ends with a petition that the community pray for Paul so that he might communicate well, and the instruction to pray at all times in the Spirit resonates not only with much earlier passages (cf. 2:18–22) but also with 4:4 and 5:18, which, in turn, links this passage to the practice of singing addressed in last week's passage.

In the end, we are reminded that all this is in preparation for and in service to proclaiming the mystery of the gospel, a mystery we have already been told is the unity of the body, a new humanity in which all things are coming together under Christ as its head (3:4–6; 5:32). Even the phrase "strength of his power" with which the passage opens is the same phrase used in 1:19–23 in which that great unity is first described. And to be empowered in the Lord, recall from the first week's passage, means to be filled with gifts of love that Christ himself has bestowed upon us for the building up of the body (4:7–10). So, even as the author evokes an image of strength from Roman military culture, the image is rewritten in order to serve the main argument of the epistle, that we are called to live and move in an economy marked by healthy communication that is the embodiment of love and that fosters unity.

We are also reminded that the stakes are high, for the battle is against cosmic powers. It is easy in the face of the language of cosmic powers to frame the author's rousing conclusion in terms of the spiritualization of the political and use this passage as a justification to withdraw from the world. Our concern is not with this world, but with the spiritual forces of wickedness. And ultimately, that may be true. But for marginalized voices, it's important to see this as a politicization of the spiritual. The powers and principalities of which the passage speaks exert their power through systems and institutions of domination and oppression that affect real lives lived out in the here and now. Furthermore, the whole course of the letter has been cosmic in scope (ch. 1–3) but social and political in its implications (ch. 4–6).

It can also be tempting in the face of a culture consumed with contentious, divisive discourse to either give up all together or to find justification in this passage for engagement in just such a culture on those very terms. And here a couple notes of clarification are helpful in steering us away from either path.

First, while one could argue that the word of God is described in terms of an offensive weapon, a sword, it is important to remember that we have already been reminded that Christ, the one, true Word of God, is love. We must also speak the truth in love, and for any who claims to “know” the only true path (recall the second week’s notes), the love of Christ surpasses knowledge (3:19).

Second, even standing firm implies engagement—listening, considering, discussing, debating—rather than stubbornness, which is rigid and not other-oriented. Much of what passes in our culture for discussion or debate under the guise of “communicating” is grounded in an unbending, stiff stubbornness and, in fact, embodies the very characteristics we are instructed to put away: bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice (4:31). Standing in the full stature of Christ (4:13), however, is marked by peace, gentleness, reconciliation, forbearance, and respectful communication and requires of us that we be prepared to walk and move in love.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

21st Century Africana Liturgy Resources for the Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, Year B, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/21st-century-africana-liturgy-resources-for-the-twelfth-sunday-after-pentec>

In Righteousness Stand Firm (hymn), <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/in-righteousness-stand-firm>

[The Great Thanksgiving for the Season After Pentecost \(Ordinary Time, or Kingdomtide\)](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Back to School Resources](#)

[Hispanic Heritage Month September 15-October 15](#)

[A Service of Holy Communion for Labor Day](#) (September 3)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads — Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

FROM WORSHIP TO DISCIPLESHIP

Adult

Week 4 - Move...in Love

[Ephesians 6:10-20](#)

Fellowship (Snacks or a Meal; 10 minutes with snacks; longer obviously, if there is a meal)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) — In pairs or groups of three, discuss: “If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes)

Opening Exercise: Name a time when you experienced overwhelming power.

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20

- Have a different person read Ephesians 1:17-20. What words and themes do these two passages from Ephesians share? [power] In Ephesians 1:20, the power refers to the power of the resurrection. When Paul refers to being strong in the Lord, what might it mean to live in light of this power at work within our lives?
- Paul uses the imagery of battle armor. What is the nature of the battle Paul is referring to? Why do you think he used this image?
- When we are baptized, one of the questions we are asked (according to *The United Methodist Hymnal*) is, “Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?” Part of this baptismal question is grounded in this passage from Ephesians. Discuss your understanding of this baptismal question.
- Which pieces of armor named by Paul are for defensive purposes and which are for offensive purposes?
- What might it look like for Christians to take up the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”? [The group could entertain both positive and negative images that come to mind. For example, some people use the Scripture as a weapon instead of as an instrument that provokes abundance and Christian maturity.]

□ (R) Paul has strategically led up to this image. How does being built up in love, learning to live in love, always giving thanks in love empowered by the Holy Spirit, equip us then to move in love?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Biblical

This passage seems to be the concluding and catch-all category in Paul's house code that began in Ephesians 5:21. A more literal translation of Ephesians 6:10 could read, "for the rest [of you], be continually empowered in the Lord and in the might of the strength of God."

Earlier, Paul commanded us to "put on the new self" (4:24), and now he commands us to "put on the whole armor of God."

The militaristic language might be off putting for some reading this passage. Yet notice the image of "armor" leads Paul to encourage us to prayer and keeping alert, so that Paul might preach the gospel boldly (verses 18-20). The imagery Paul uses is about battling, not people but "the spiritual forces of evil" (v. 12).

Theological

Christian Perfection

The first thought we might have when it comes to Christian perfection is something like the Ten Commandments or some other "Thou shall not" list. That's not entirely wrong. There is a sense in which we Methodists believe that Christian perfection is a freedom from sinful behaviors. Equally true is that we believe Christian perfection has a positive meaning — freedom for new behaviors. More specifically, as we grow closer to Christ, we gain a freedom that enables us to grow in loving God and neighbors more fully. Like our salvation, Christian perfection is ultimately a work of God. Therefore, growing in Christian perfection includes repentance and works of piety (Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, receiving Communion) and works of mercy (acts of compassion, working at a soup kitchen, hospitality to strangers). All these are more than good deeds, but acts that open us to receiving more of the power of God's transforming grace.

Sending Forth (2 minutes)—End by praying the Wesley Covenant Prayer together:

"I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things

to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.”

Intergenerational
Ephesians 6:10-20

Ephesians 6:10-20, NRSV: 10 “Finally, **be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.** 11 **Put on the whole armor of God**, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.”

Introduce Paul and Ephesians

The apostle Paul was a teacher and pastor in the time after Jesus returned to heaven. Paul went to different cities and told people that Jesus is the Messiah whom God raised from the dead! Paul started many churches. Church leaders wrote him letters, asking questions about what they should do. Paul prayed and listened closely to what God told him. He wrote letters to guide the church as a community of faith in Jesus. Paul’s letters on how to live as a Christian became part of the Bible in the New Testament. These letters help us to grow as disciples today. Ephesians is a letter to the church in Ephesus, a big port city in Turkey where many people worshiped other gods.

Our verses for today are Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 10 and 11, “**be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God.**”

Can you think of any special clothes or gear that people wear to play a sport?

(Suggestions may include a bicycle helmet, shin guards and cleats for soccer, a hockey goalie's gear, a baseball catcher's pads and mask, etc. Affirm answers. Add other suggestions as you feel led.)

These are things to protect the body and help to do good job in the game.

In a similar way, we are to put on the whole armor of God.

But it's different; it's invisible! It's like a spiritual layer between us and the world.

The whole armor of God is powerful because it is from the Lord Jesus.

Every part matters, so we should think about putting it on through prayer every morning.

Our belt: truthfulness and honesty hold everything together securely.

Our breastplate: righteousness is doing what is right and good in God's sight. We listen to the Holy Spirit in our heart, and the Holy Spirit gives us the courage to do the right thing.

Our shoes: make us ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, the good news of Jesus.

We are prepared to go and walk right in and speak a peaceful word to people.

Our shield: faith is a strong shield that we hold and move. Faith deflects the fiery messages of doubt and unbelief. They just bounce off, fizzle out, and don't get through to us.

Our helmet: salvation is knowing in our mind that Jesus is our Savior. We remember that we can count on his faithfulness because he has already saved us.

Our sword of the Spirit is God's word. God's word cuts through lies and gives us wisdom.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for providing what we need to live as brave Christians in the world.

Please help us every day to trust you and your spiritual power. Thank you for sending your Spirit who keeps us alert and helps us to pray for others. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Print this page for children and parents to read each morning as they prepare for the day. They can draw or color an image of themselves wearing the armor on the other side.

The Whole Armor of God

It's invisible, like a spiritual layer between me and the world,
with the strength of Jesus' resurrection power.

My helmet: salvation is knowing in my mind that Jesus is my Savior. I remember that I can count on Jesus' faithfulness because he has already saved me.

My breastplate: righteousness is doing what is right and good in God's sight. I listen to the Holy Spirit in my heart; the Holy Spirit gives me courage to do the right thing.

My shield: faith is a strong shield that I hold and move. Faith deflects the fiery messages of doubt and unbelief. They just bounce off, fizzle out, and don't get through to me.

My sword of the Spirit is God's word. God's word cuts through lies and gives me wisdom.

My belt: truthfulness and honesty hold everything together securely.

My shoes: make me ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, the good news of Jesus Christ. I am always prepared to go, to walk forward and speak a peaceful word to people.

See Ephesians 6:10-20.