MCPHERSON FIRST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Discipleship Guide

Forming disciples of Jesus Christ who
love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously.

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REFERENCE

Quick Reference: The 25 Beliefs

What this church holds, in one line each, with its page.

WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

1 **One God, maker of everything** The world was made, and called good. 17
2 **God is Trinity** One God whose own life is relationship. 18
3 **Every person bears God's image** A worth nobody issues and nobody can revoke. 19
4 **Sin is real, and we can't fix it ourselves** The trouble runs deeper than effort reaches. 20
5 **God keeps covenant** Promises kept to people who don't keep theirs. 21
6 **God became human in Jesus** Fully God and fully human, and never explained. 22
7 **The life and teaching of Jesus show us what God is like** Watch how he spent his time. 23
8 **The cross** God absorbing what separates us, and refusing to answer violence with violence. 24
9 **God raised Jesus from the dead** Death has been beaten, and beaten for us. 25
10 **Christ reigns, and Christ will come again** God will finish putting the world right. 26
11 **The Holy Spirit is God present and at work** Already working before you begin. 27
12 **Scripture is our primary authority** The first word and the loudest one. 28
13 **The church is Christ's body, sent into the world** A body with work to do. 29
14 **Baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments** Signs you can see, touch, and taste. 30
15 **The kingdom of God is here and still coming** Already breaking in, still on its way. 31

THE METHODIST ACCENT

16 **Prevenient grace** God moves first, before you know it. 33
17 **Justifying grace** The moment you say yes, the new birth, and knowing it. 34
18 **Sanctifying grace** Going on toward perfect love, across a whole life. 35
19 **All can be saved** Christ died for everyone, and anyone can say yes. 36
20 **The means of grace** Practices where God reliably shows up. 37
21 **Do no harm, do good, stay close to God** Wesley's three rules. 38
22 **Scripture, read with tradition, reason, and experience** Scripture leads; three others help us hear it. 39
23 **Personal faith and social holiness, held together** Conversion and justice aren't rivals. 40
24 **The open table** Communion belongs to Christ, not to us. 41
25 **A church held together by connection** No congregation stands alone. 42

REFERENCE

Quick Reference: The 25 Practices

Every practice in this guide, with its page.

PRAYERS

1 **Daily Bible Reading** A few verses every day. 51
2 **Daily Prayer** Talking with God every day. 52
3 **Praying for Others** Holding people before God by name. 53
4 **The Covenant Prayer** "I am no longer my own, but thine." 54
5 **Fasting** Going without, to make room. 55

PRESENCE

6 **Engaged Worship** Showing up on purpose rather than out of habit. 57
7 **Receiving Communion** Coming to the table with open hands. 58
8 **Bible Study or Class** Learning scripture with other people. 59
9 **Honest Conversation** Telling someone the truth about your actual life. 60
10 **Showing Up for Life's Moments** Being there for the big moments, happy and hard. 61

GIFTS

11 **First-Fruits Giving** Giving first rather than from what's left. 63
12 **Growing Toward a Tithe** Moving one percent at a time toward ten. 64
13 **Gain, Save, Give All You Can** Wesley's whole rule for money. 65
14 **Everyday Generosity** Small, unbudgeted, unrecorded giving. 66
15 **Giving Thanks** Naming what you've been given. 67

SERVICE

16 **Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts** Finding what God built you to do. 69
17 **Acts of Mercy** Meeting a need directly, with your own hands. 70
18 **Visiting the Sick and Homebound** Going to people who can't come to you. 71
19 **Knowing Your Neighbors** Learning the names of the people closest to you. 72
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WITNESS

21 **Telling Your Story** Saying plainly what God has done for you. 75
22 **The Invitation** Asking someone to come with you. 76
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25 **Keeping Your Word** Letting your yes mean yes. 79

PART ONE

Welcome and Belonging

Whoever you are and wherever you have come from, there is room for you here, and a place to begin.

Welcome

Welcome to McPherson First United Methodist Church. Whether you're visiting for the first time or you've called this congregation home for forty years, this guide is for you. We're glad you're here.

Christians have always believed that God is at work making people more loving, and that the work is God's before it's ours. What we bring is our willingness and our attention. This guide tries to say plainly what we believe, and to put some tools in your hands.

What's in here. The first half names what we believe: fifteen convictions Christians hold in common, and ten more where the Methodist accent falls. The second half takes the five promises this church is built on and turns them into twenty-five practices you can start this week.

How to use it. This is reference material. Keep it where you can find it, and come back to it. It isn't a devotional to read a page a day, and it isn't a book you finish. You might read the welcome and the promises straight through, work on a few practices over the next several months, then turn back to the beliefs when a question comes up: at a graveside, in an argument, or when a nine-year-old asks something you haven't thought about in years. The quick reference at the front gets you to any practice in one step.

You don't have to be a member to use any of it. Anyone can pray, show up, give, serve, and tell somebody what God has done for them. If you want to talk about joining, talk to a pastor, contact the church office, or visit mcphersonfirst.org/next.

Who We Are

Our mission. To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

This is the mission of the whole United Methodist Church, and it's ours. It comes out of John Wesley's conviction that faith changes people and changes communities, and it names the one thing we exist to do.

Our vision. The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.

If the mission is what we do, the vision is who we're becoming. Three commitments carry it:

- **Love Boldly**, reaching toward God and toward our neighbors without holding back.
- **Serve Joyfully**, giving ourselves to others out of gladness, not obligation.
- **Lead Courageously**, stepping up to do the faithful thing, even when it's hard.

You'll see those three throughout the life of the church. They aren't only what we're aiming at. They're also how we've agreed to behave with one another here.

What we do together. We form disciples of Jesus Christ, and we grow together in the way of Jesus. The question underneath that is a plain one: how do we hope people live if they're connected here? The five promises are our answer, and the rest of this guide is what they look like in an ordinary week. Worship

on Sunday morning. A Grace Group on Wednesday night. A meal carried across town to somebody just home from the hospital. A gift given on the first of the month. A hard conversation over coffee that a friend finally started.

The Five Promises

There are many ways to be a faithful follower of Jesus. At McPherson First we organize ours around five promises that have shaped Methodists for generations. Anyone can live them, starting today, whether or not you ever join anything. Members say them out loud when they join, in words the church has used for a long time, but the promises were never the property of members.

> *"Will you faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness?"*

Prayers	You talk with God and listen for God, in prayer and in scripture. Over time it becomes a daily conversation that shapes how you live.
Presence	You show up for worship and for the life of the church. Most weeks that's Sunday morning, plus a group or a class where people know your name.
Gifts	You give money to support the church's mission. You start where you can and grow toward tithing, ten percent of your income, given regularly.
Service	You find where God is calling you to serve and you give yourself to it. Usually that settles into one place where you show up, using what you're actually good at.
Witness	You tell people what God has done for you, and you live in a way that backs it up. Often it's as simple as inviting someone to come with you.

No order, and no finish line. The five aren't five steps. There's nothing to work through in sequence and nothing to complete. You can start anywhere. Some people pray their way in. Some serve their way in. Some give generously for years before they can say what they believe. Wherever you start, the invitation is to grow in all five rather than pick a favorite and stay there.

Where this is going. Methodists call this growth sanctification, and we believe it takes a whole life. God keeps working, and the direction is what Wesley called perfect love of God and neighbor. Nobody graduates. What matters is the direction your life is facing.

Anyone can live them. Most serving, learning, and faith formation opportunities at McPherson First are open to everyone, member or not. Members simply promise the five out loud, in front of the congregation, and the congregation promises back to surround them with a community of love and forgiveness.

What it means to be a member. Membership is how you say yes to all five out loud, with this congregation, and how this congregation commits to walk it with you. You're saying: this is my church family, I'm choosing to grow here, serve here, and be accountable here. Accountability is the part people skip over, and it's the part that makes the rest work. Somebody notices when you're gone. Somebody asks how the praying is going. Members also vote in church meetings and can serve on the Leadership Board. To take that step, talk to a pastor, contact the church office, or visit mcphersonfirst.org/next.

An invitation, not a test. You can begin today, just as you are. Maybe you've never prayed out loud. Maybe giving feels frightening. Maybe you're not sure what you believe. That's all right. These promises aren't about perfection. They give direction, and we grow toward them together, one step at a time. If you can't get to the building because of age or illness, the promises still belong to you. Tell a pastor. We'll bring Communion to your living room, and people from this church will come and see you.

Who Is Welcome Here

All are welcome here. Not welcome to visit, welcome to belong: to worship, to serve, to give, to join a group, and to become a member.

We unite around the core of Christian faith, the lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of scripture, and the power of grace, and we leave room for honest disagreement about how those commitments play out. People in this congregation hold a range of convictions on the questions that have divided many churches, and you're welcome here regardless of where you land. We ordain women and men equally.

People ask specifically about LGBTQ inclusion, and you deserve a straight answer rather than having to read between the lines. In May 2024 the General Conference removed the language calling the practice of homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching, along with the bans on ordaining LGBTQ clergy and on clergy officiating same-sex weddings. If you are LGBTQ, that welcome is yours. If you hold a traditional view of marriage, it's yours on exactly the same terms. Neither of you is on probation. Neither of you is being tolerated until you change your mind. We would rather be a church where this conversation happens face to face, among people who have promised to love each other, than a church where everyone already agrees.

There's more to say about what the denomination now permits and about who decides whether a wedding happens here. *Becoming a Member*, the booklet we walk people through when they're considering joining, lays all of it out. Ask a pastor for a copy, or just ask the question.

PART TWO

What Christians Believe

Fifteen convictions the church holds in common. None of them are ours alone, and we wouldn't want them to be.

These fifteen aren't Methodist beliefs. They're Christian ones. Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and Orthodox Christians hold them along with us, and have held them for a very long time. The ten in the next part are where the Methodist accent falls, and even those are differences of weight and vocabulary rather than a different gospel.

They're short on purpose. Every one of them could fill a book, and most of them have. What's here is enough to know what this church means when it uses the word.

01 One God, maker of everything



God is one, and everything that exists was made by God and called good. That's the first claim scripture makes, and the rest leans on it. The world isn't an accident, isn't a mistake, and isn't a prison to escape. Bodies, soil, water, animals, and neighbors all matter, because God made them and hasn't walked away from them. It also means God isn't the largest thing inside the universe. God is the reason there's a universe.

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 1:1, 31 · Psalm 24:1*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one place in creation where you noticed God's care this week. Talk about what changes when you treat it as something God made and called good.

LIVED OUT IN *11 First-Fruits Giving · 13 Gain, Save, Give All You Can · 15 Giving Thanks*

02 God is Trinity

One God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not three gods, and not one God wearing three masks, but one God whose own life is relationship. If God is love, then God was love before there was anything else to love, which means love isn't something God took up. It's who God is. It also means that when you're drawn toward God, met in Jesus, and changed from the inside, the same God is doing all three.

SCRIPTURE *Matthew 28:19 · 2 Corinthians 13:13 · 1 John 4:8*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what it means to you that God's own life is relationship. Talk about one relationship of yours that could reflect that love this week.

LIVED OUT IN *02 Daily Prayer · 06 Engaged Worship · 09 Honest Conversation*

03 Every person bears God's image

Scripture says God made humanity in God's own image (Genesis 1:27). Whatever else that means, it means a worth nobody issues and nobody can revoke: not earned by usefulness, intelligence, productivity, health, or good behavior. This conviction is the ground under every hospital the church built, every school, every protest, and every meal handed across a counter. It's also the hardest belief to hold while you're looking at someone you can't stand. God's image is there anyway.

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 1:27 · Psalm 139:13-14 · James 3:9*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a time someone treated you as though you carried God's image. Name one person you could treat that way this week.

LIVED OUT IN *03 Praying for Others · 18 Visiting the Sick and Homebound · 19 Knowing Your Neighbors*

04 Sin is real, and we can't fix it ourselves

Sin is bigger than a list of wrong things people do. It's the harm we cause, the good we leave undone, the way we curve in on ourselves, and the systems that grind people down while everyone involved feels reasonable. Scripture's diagnosis is that the problem reaches all of us, and that nobody thinks or tries or legislates a way out of it. That's a hard diagnosis, and it's why grace matters so much to Methodists. If trying harder were enough, we'd need better instructions. Christians believe what we needed was rescue, and that God came and did the rescuing.

SCRIPTURE *Romans 3:23-24 · Romans 7:18-19*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a place where you've tried to fix yourself and couldn't. Talk about what it would mean to bring that to God instead of trying harder.

LIVED OUT IN *02 Daily Prayer · 09 Honest Conversation · 24 Forgiving and Reconciling*

05 God keeps covenant

From Noah to Abraham and Sarah, through Moses and the prophets, scripture tells one long story of God making promises and keeping them to people who don't keep theirs. Israel's story isn't a warm-up act, and the church didn't replace Israel. Christians were grafted into a story God was already telling. What this belief gives you is confidence. The God who has been faithful that long isn't going to change character now.

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 12:1-3 · Lamentations 3:22-23 · Romans 11:17-18*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share your favorite story of God keeping a promise in scripture, from Noah to the prophets. Talk about what it tells you about God's character.

LIVED OUT IN *01 Daily Bible Reading · 12 Growing Toward a Tithe · 21 Telling Your Story · 25 Keeping Your Word*

06 God became human in Jesus

In Jesus of Nazareth, God took on an actual human life. Born to a poor family under an occupying army, growing up, getting tired, eating with people, burying a friend and weeping about it. Not God in a costume, and not an unusually good man promoted afterward. Fully God and fully human. The church has never managed to fully explain that and has never been willing to give it up either. Some of what's truest about God stays a mystery, and this is the central one. It matters because it means God knows what this is like from the inside.

SCRIPTURE *John 1:14 · Philippians 2:6-8 · Hebrews 4:15*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share which part of Jesus' human life helps you most: getting tired, eating with people, or weeping at a friend's grave. Talk about why.

LIVED OUT IN *10 Showing Up for Life's Moments · 18 Visiting the Sick and Homebound · 19 Knowing Your Neighbors*

07 The life and teaching of Jesus show us what God is like

Jesus didn't come only to die. He healed people, fed them, argued with the powerful, forgave the unforgivable, and told stories that are still working on us two thousand years later. When you want to know what God is for and what God is against, watch how Jesus spent his time and notice who he ate with. The Sermon on the Mount isn't a set of impossible ideals to admire from a distance. It describes the life the kingdom makes possible.

SCRIPTURE *Luke 4:18-19 · Matthew 5:1-12 · John 14:9*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Read part of the Sermon on the Mount and share one line you'd rather admire than live. Talk about what living it would look like this week.

LIVED OUT IN *14 Everyday Generosity · 17 Acts of Mercy · 19 Knowing Your Neighbors*

08 The cross

†

Jesus was executed by the Roman state with religious cooperation. Christians have never settled on a single explanation of how the cross saves, and the church has carried several at once for most of its history. Here's what we agree on. On the cross God absorbed everything that separates us from God, and refused to answer violence with violence. It's God declining to stop loving at the exact point where love costs everything.

SCRIPTURE *Mark 15:33-39 · Romans 5:8 · 2 Corinthians 5:19*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share which way of understanding the cross has meant the most to you, and when. Name one place you could refuse to answer harm with harm this week.

LIVED OUT IN *04 The Covenant Prayer · 05 Fasting · 07 Receiving Communion · 24 Forgiving and Reconciling*

09 God raised Jesus from the dead



On the third day the tomb was empty and his friends met him alive. Without it there's an admirable teacher and a sad ending. With it, death has been beaten, and beaten for us. This is also where Christian hope at a graveside comes from. It doesn't make grief small. We stand at gravesides and weep like everybody else. But we weep facing a God who has been through death and come out the other side. That God has promised not to leave us there.

SCRIPTURE *Luke 24:1-9 · 1 Corinthians 15:20-22*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a loss where hope in the resurrection mattered to you. Talk about how you held grief and hope at the same time.

LIVED OUT IN *06 Engaged Worship · 10 Showing Up for Life's Moments · 22 The Invitation*

10 Christ reigns, and Christ will come again

Jesus is Lord. That was a political sentence before it was a religious one, because it meant Caesar wasn't. Christians also confess that the story has an ending God has already chosen. Christ will come again, and God will finish putting the world right. Nobody knows when, and everyone who has claimed to have the schedule has been wrong. The belief asks for a posture rather than a calculation.

SCRIPTURE *Philippians 2:9-11 · Revelation 21:1-5*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one thing competing to be lord of your life right now. Talk about what it looks like to wait for Christ with hope instead of worry.

LIVED OUT IN *04 The Covenant Prayer · 16 Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts · 23 Living the Three Simple Rules*

11 The Holy Spirit is God present and at work

The Spirit isn't a force or a mood. The Spirit is God, here now, doing the work: convicting, comforting, gathering the church, handing out gifts, and slowly making people more like Jesus. Every practice in the last part of this guide assumes the Spirit is already working before you begin. Prayer isn't how you get God's attention. It's how you join something already under way.

SCRIPTURE *John 14:16-17 · Acts 2:1-4 · Galatians 5:22-23*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share something God seems to be doing around you that you could join. Talk about what joining it would look like this week.

LIVED OUT IN *02 Daily Prayer · 16 Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts · 20 Teaching and Mentoring*

12 Scripture is our primary authority

The Bible is a library of sixty-six books written across roughly a thousand years, and Christians hold it as the Word of God and the essential guide for faith and life. It gets the first word and the loudest one. Two things shape how we read it. We read every part of it in the light of Jesus, because he is what the whole book is pointing at. And we read it together, in worship and in groups, because a verse read alone is easy to bend toward whatever we already wanted it to say.

SCRIPTURE *2 Timothy 3:16-17 · Psalm 119:105 · Luke 24:27*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one verse that has shaped a decision you made. Talk about how you knew you were reading it faithfully.

LIVED OUT IN *01 Daily Bible Reading · 06 Engaged Worship · 08 Bible Study or Class*

13 The church is Christ's body, sent into the world

The church isn't a building, an hour, or a nonprofit. It's the people God has gathered and sent. The creed calls the church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic: one across denominations, set apart for God, universal rather than local (that's all "catholic" means there), and carrying what the apostles handed on. A congregation is one visible piece of that, and it's a body with work to do.

SCRIPTURE *1 Corinthians 12:12-27 · Matthew 28:19-20*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one piece of work this congregation does as Christ's body and where you fit in it. Name one part of the body you'd like to know better.

LIVED OUT IN *03 Praying for Others · 08 Bible Study or Class · 22 The Invitation · 25 Keeping Your Word*

14 Baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments

A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward grace: something you can see, touch, and taste, through which God actually does something. Christ gave the church two.

Baptism is the sign of God's covenant with you. It happens once, by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, and all three are valid. United Methodists baptize infants as well as adults, because baptism announces what God is doing before anybody is able to respond. Any Christian baptism is recognized here, so nobody is ever baptized a second time.

Holy Communion is the meal. In the bread and the cup we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, give thanks, and are fed for the road ahead. Christ is truly present in it, not in a way anybody can fully explain, but really and graciously. We celebrate it often in worship, and the invitation comes from Christ rather than from us. Come with open hands, and receive.

SCRIPTURE *Romans 6:3-4 · 1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what you bring to the Communion table and what you carry away.

LIVED OUT IN *07 Receiving Communion · 10 Showing Up for Life's Moments · 20 Teaching and Mentoring · 21 Telling Your Story*

15 The kingdom of God is here and still coming

Jesus taught his followers to pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's still the prayer, and praying it commits you to working for it. The kingdom is already breaking in wherever people are fed, freed, forgiven, and loved, and it's still on its way. Every meal handed to a hungry neighbor and every unjust thing set right is the kingdom showing up early. Christians live between those two facts, building what we can of the world God intends and trusting God to finish what we can't.

SCRIPTURE *Mark 1:15 · Matthew 6:10 · Luke 17:20-21*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a place in McPherson where you've seen the kingdom show up early. Talk about one thing you could do this month to help it along.

LIVED OUT IN *14 Everyday Generosity · 15 Giving Thanks · 17 Acts of Mercy · 23 Living the Three Simple Rules*

PART THREE

The Methodist Accent

Ten more, where the emphasis falls differently. Not a different gospel, and mostly about grace.

These ten are where United Methodists put the emphasis. Most of them come down to grace, which is the word Methodists reach for first and keep reaching for. None of it is a different gospel. It's the same faith with a particular accent.

16 Prevenient grace: God moves first

"Prevenient" is an old word meaning "coming before." It names God's grace already at work in your life before you know it: the nudge toward goodness, the discomfort with what you were about to do, the sense that you aren't alone in the room, the pull toward a church door you hadn't planned to walk through. Methodists insist that's grace and not your own good instincts. It's why we baptize infants, why the Communion table is open to anyone, and why nobody has to get their life in order before walking in.

SCRIPTURE *1 John 4:19 · John 6:44 · Titus 2:11*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a nudge toward goodness you felt this week, or a discomfort with what you were about to do. Talk about what you did with it.

LIVED OUT IN *03 Praying for Others · 11 First-Fruits Giving · 15 Giving Thanks*

17 Justifying grace: the new birth, and knowing it

Justifying grace is the moment you say yes. Forgiveness, a new beginning, a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, not earned but received. Wesley called the change that follows the new birth. He meant that something actually changes in you, not just that God decides to overlook your record. Out of hard personal experience he also insisted you can know it. Wesley called that assurance: the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:16). It's a gift rather than a requirement. If you've never felt it, you haven't failed at anything.

SCRIPTURE *Ephesians 2:8-9 · Romans 5:1 · Romans 8:16*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share when you first knew you were forgiven, or whether you're still waiting to know it. Talk about what changed in you afterward.

LIVED OUT IN *07 Receiving Communion · 21 Telling Your Story · 24 Forgiving and Reconciling*

18 Sanctifying grace: going on toward perfect love

Salvation isn't one moment. It's a direction. Sanctifying grace is the Holy Spirit's ongoing work making you more loving and more like Jesus across a whole life. Some Wesleyan traditions teach entire sanctification as a single definitive second experience. United Methodists understand it as a lifelong process that arrives in fits and starts rather than one dramatic moment. Wesley's name for where it's headed was Christian perfection, by which he meant perfect love of God and neighbor rather than flawlessness. What matters is the direction your life is facing, not a finish line you cross once.

SCRIPTURE *Philippians 3:12-14 · Matthew 22:37-39 · 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one way you're more loving than you were five years ago, and one place you're still stuck. Talk about what helps you keep going on.

LIVED OUT IN *04 The Covenant Prayer · 05 Fasting · 12 Growing Toward a Tithe · 25 Keeping Your Word*

19 All can be saved

Some Christian traditions teach that God decided in advance who would be saved. Methodists don't. We believe Christ died for everyone, that God's grace is offered to everyone, and that anyone can accept it or refuse it. Wesley preached this hard and against strong opposition, because he believed the alternative made God smaller than the gospel says God is. It's also why Methodist preaching sounds the way it does. If the invitation is for everyone, you keep giving it.

SCRIPTURE *John 3:16 · 1 Timothy 2:3-4 · 2 Peter 3:9*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share about someone you've been tempted to think is beyond God's reach, without naming them. Talk about what it would look like to pray for them this week.

LIVED OUT IN *03 Praying for Others · 19 Knowing Your Neighbors · 22 The Invitation*

20 The means of grace

God has given particular practices where God reliably meets us: prayer, searching the scriptures, the Lord's Supper, fasting, worship, and Christian conferencing, which is Wesley's phrase for talking honestly with other Christians about your actual life. Methodists call these the means of grace. They aren't good habits performed for God's benefit, and doing them doesn't earn you anything from God. They're simply the places God has promised to meet us. The five promises are means of grace, and so are the twenty-five practices in the last part of this guide.

SCRIPTURE *Acts 2:42 · Luke 24:30-35*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share which means of grace meets you most reliably right now and which one you've let slide. Name one step back toward it.

LIVED OUT IN *02 Daily Prayer · 05 Fasting · 06 Engaged Worship · 09 Honest Conversation*

21 Do no harm, do good, stay close to God

Wesley gave the first Methodists three rules, put here in today's words, and they still hold. **Do no harm:** before you act, ask whether it will wound you or anyone else. **Do good:** at every opportunity, in every way you can, be actively generous with your time, your money, and your compassion. **Stay close to God:** keep up the means of grace, because the first two rules run dry without the third. These three rules are short enough to carry in your head and demanding enough to last a lifetime. They're also doctrinal standards of the denomination, not a slogan.

SCRIPTURE *Micah 6:8 · Galatians 6:10*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one decision this week where one of the three rules changed what you did. Talk about which rule you tend to forget first.

LIVED OUT IN *13 Gain, Save, Give All You Can · 14 Everyday Generosity · 18 Visiting the Sick and Homebound · 23 Living the Three Simple Rules*

22 Scripture, read with tradition, reason, and experience

Scripture leads. But nobody reads it in a vacuum, and Methodists say so out loud. Three other sources help us read it faithfully. **Tradition** is what Christians have believed and practiced for centuries, so we listen to the people who came before us. **Reason** is the mind God gave us, and faith doesn't require anybody to stop thinking. **Experience** is our own encounter with God, and the lives of the people around us, which keeps an answer honest. This is often called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. The four aren't equals competing for the last word. Scripture leads, and the other three help us hear it clearly.

SCRIPTURE *1 Thessalonians 5:21 · Acts 17:11 · 2 Timothy 1:5*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a time your experience seemed to pull against what scripture says. Talk about how you worked it through, and who helped.

LIVED OUT IN *01 Daily Bible Reading · 08 Bible Study or Class · 09 Honest Conversation · 20 Teaching and Mentoring*

23 Personal faith and social holiness, held together

Wesley said there is no holiness but social holiness. He meant that faith is never a private transaction. It gets worked out among people, and it shows up in how a society treats its weakest members. Wesley visited prisoners and started clinics. The denomination maintains the Social Principles, a teaching document bringing the gospel to bear on poverty, racial justice, and care of creation. They're meant to inform your conscience, not to tell you what you have to think. Methodists have tried to separate conversion from justice, and those are the seasons we're least proud of. The church split over slavery in 1844. It kept a separate, racially segregated jurisdiction for Black churches and pastors until 1968.

SCRIPTURE *Matthew 25:35-40 · James 2:14-17 · Amos 5:24*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share how your faith shows up in the way you treat neighbors most in need here in McPherson. Name one thing you could do this month.

LIVED OUT IN *12 Growing Toward a Tithe · 13 Gain, Save, Give All You Can · 17 Acts of Mercy*

24 The open table

All people are welcome at the Lord's Table here, whether or not they're members of this church or any church, and whether their faith feels solid or shaky that particular morning. This follows straight from prevenient grace. God's invitation goes out before anybody has it figured out. Many traditions fence the table and they have reasons for it. Methodists don't, because the table belongs to Christ and not to us.

SCRIPTURE *Luke 14:21-23 · John 6:35*

NOTES

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what it means to you that everyone is welcome at the table here. Name someone you'd like to see there.

LIVED OUT IN *07 Receiving Communion · 22 The Invitation · 24 Forgiving and Reconciling*

25 A church held together by connection

No United Methodist congregation stands alone. Churches are bound to one another through conferences, shared mission, and shared money, and decisions get made by clergy and laity together at every level. Bishops appoint pastors rather than congregations hiring them, which means pastors go where they're needed and congregations receive pastoral leadership even through seasons of transition. Your giving at McPherson First reaches past our walls to disaster relief, seminary education, and United Methodist churches around the world. When you join here, you join a global church.

SCRIPTURE *Acts 11:27-30 · 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 · Acts 15:6*

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a time this church was helped by being part of something bigger, or helped someone else. Talk about what you'd miss if it stood alone.

LIVED OUT IN *10 Showing Up for Life's Moments · 11 First-Fruits Giving · 16 Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts*

PART FOUR

Growing in the Five Promises

Twenty-five ways to live the five promises, five under each one. Pick one. Start small.

The first church grew this way. Right after Pentecost, Acts says, "The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers" (Acts 2:42). The next few verses fill in the rest. They met every day. They shared everything and gave to anyone who needed it. They showed God's goodness to everyone, and the Lord added to their number daily. That's prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, lived by ordinary people before anyone had names for them. They didn't have a program. They kept a few simple practices together, day after day, and God used those practices to form them into a people.

These twenty-five practices aren't the whole of Christian practice. Christians have prayed, fasted, given, served, and told the truth in a thousand different forms over two thousand years, and no list of twenty-five holds all of it. Leave this book on a shelf for a century and somebody will find a practice missing that they can't imagine living without.

What this list is, is workable. Five practices under each of the five promises. Every one of them has been tested across centuries of Christian life. None of them require expertise, money, or unusual amounts of time. You could start any of them on a Tuesday.

None of it is a checklist to complete, and none of it earns anything. Each practice is a way of opening yourself to God's grace and letting it work on you. The growth is grace's doing. A few things are worth knowing before you start. Growth is gradual. Most of these feel awkward the first few times, which is a sign you're doing something new. Faith deepens through repetition more than through insight. And you don't have to do any of it alone.

The Five Promises Self-Assessment

Start here. This is a simple tool for seeing where you are across the five promises, and it's more useful taken twice than once. Take it at the start of a small-group season, or twice a year on your own, then take it again and compare. Watching the numbers move is one of the clearest ways to see God's sanctifying grace at work in your own life.

Rate yourself 1 to 5, where 1 means "rarely or never" and 5 means "this is a regular rhythm of my life." A low number is information, not a verdict. Some seasons are thin, and grace doesn't keep score. Each promise has two rows so you can see what moved.

Dates taken: first _____ and again _____.

Prayers

I am setting aside regular time for prayer, scripture, and listening for God's voice.

FIRST	1	2	3	4	5	REGULARLY
AGAIN	1	2	3	4	5	

Presence

I am showing up for worship and the life of the church, including a small group or class where I am known.

FIRST	1	2	3	4	5	REGULARLY
AGAIN	1	2	3	4	5	

Gifts

I am giving financially to support the church's mission, growing toward a tithe over time.

FIRST	1	2	3	4	5	REGULARLY
AGAIN	1	2	3	4	5	

Service

I am serving in at least one church ministry or in my community, using my gifts for the good of others.

FIRST (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) REGULARLY

AGAIN (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Witness

I am sharing my faith through my words and actions, naturally inviting others into what God is doing.

FIRST (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) REGULARLY

AGAIN (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Reflect. Which promise feels strongest right now? Which feels weakest? Pick one practice from this guide that could help you grow where growth is most needed.

What's forming you? Everyone is being shaped by something: a schedule, a screen, a worry, a paycheck. Where is your life being shaped more by something else than by God? Which practice could help you turn back toward God there?

Walking Through the Practices

Here are four ways to use the practices, and answers to the questions people ask most often.

On your own. Pick one practice that interests you and try it for a week. Notice what changes. Pick another the following week. Some will become a regular rhythm and some will be a season. There's no order you have to follow, and curiosity and consistency matter more than completeness.

With a small group. A group can use the practices any way that fits. Three patterns work well. *Open conversation:* let the practices surface as people talk about their week, and use the "Take it deeper" prompt when conversation needs a push. *One promise per season:* walk through a promise's five practices over five or six weeks and leave the rest of the season open. Over three seasons a group covers most of the book. *One practice per week:* try one, talk about it the next week, move on. The practices give the group something specific to talk about, and the group gives the practices somewhere to land.

With a pastor. If you're new here and want a guided path, ask a pastor about walking through this guide together, often one conversation a week for six weeks with a practice to try in between. Reading it on your own and bringing questions to a single conversation works just as well.

Along with Sunday. Sunday sermons often take up a belief and a practice from this guide. Read the belief, try the practice that week, and bring what happened to your group or a friend.

Where do I start? Begin with one. Pick the promise where you most want to grow, choose a single practice under it, and give it a few weeks. Small and steady beats ambitious and short-lived. The quick reference at the front of this guide lists all twenty-five with their pages.

Do I have to do all twenty-five? No. Most people live a handful well in any given season and let the others wait their turn. When you want more, the companion guide, *Going Deeper*, has fifty more practices for particular seasons and callings.

What if I miss days and fall out of rhythm? That's normal, and it isn't failure. These are means of grace, not a performance you pass or fail. When you notice you've drifted, begin again, gently.

Can we do these as a family? Yes. Several practices work well at home with kids: Daily Prayer at the dinner table, Giving Thanks, Everyday Generosity, Knowing Your Neighbors, and Showing Up for Life's Moments. Let the kids help choose one, and talk about how it went over dinner.

What does the whole thing come down to? Three moves, and you can start them this week. Pick one practice that stirs something in you and give it a week. Take one small step, without waiting to feel ready. Then bring it to somebody: a small group, a friend, your family. Lived out, the whole guide looks ordinary. A prayer on a hard morning. A meal carried to a neighbor. A hand raised to serve. An honest conversation over coffee. That's what following Jesus looks like.

> **Take the next step:** mcphersonfirst.org/next · Small Groups · Baptism · Confirmation · Serving · Give



Prayers

Daily conversation with God that shapes how you live.

FIVE PRACTICES

Prayers means daily conversation with God, through both prayer and scripture, that shapes how you live. Christian tradition has practiced this in countless forms across two thousand years: silent and spoken, written and sung, alone and together, in words of our own and in the words of the Bible. The common thread is that it isn't primarily about getting God's attention or extracting answers. It's about staying connected. The Holy Spirit is already at work in you before you begin, and prayer is how you join in.

The five practices in this section are doorways into that connection. The first two, daily Bible reading and daily prayer, sit under everything else in this guide; they're the first two ways Wesley named that God meets us. The other three widen them. Try one. Notice what changes. Talk about it with somebody who will ask you how it's going.

01 Daily Bible Reading

Daily Bible reading means reading a few verses of scripture every day. A simple plan tells you where to pick up tomorrow. It's a plain way into the Bible, and the other ways build on it. You won't understand everything you read, and you can keep reading anyway.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, counted searching the scriptures among the chief ways God meets us. He measured every other book by the Bible and came back to it every day, so he said he wanted to be "a man of one book." That one book is really a library, though, and readers who start at Genesis 1 often stall somewhere in Leviticus. A plan helps. Start with one of the four Gospels, the books that tell the story of Jesus. Mark is the shortest. Read a few verses a day, and when you finish it, move on to another Gospel. Over time you'll notice things you skimmed the first time through. Some days a passage lands. Most days nothing stands out, and that counts too, because the words are still taking root in you (Psalm 1:2-3).

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Read a few verses of Mark a day, or a whole chapter when you have time
- Follow a reading plan, on your phone or on paper
- Read at the same time each day, with coffee or before bed
- Some days, read one short passage slowly and listen for one word (Lectio Divina)
- Read with someone else on the same plan and text each other one verse

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one verse from this week's reading that stayed with you and what you think God was saying through it. If you fell behind, say where you'll start again.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 5, 12, 22*

02 Daily Prayer

Daily prayer means talking with God every day. A regular time, morning or evening, might make it easier to keep. It doesn't have to be long or eloquent. Many Christians build their prayer around the Lord's Prayer, the one Jesus taught his own disciples when they asked him how to pray (Luke 11:1-4).

Many people find it easier to pray when they have a set time and place. Daniel prayed three times a day at an open window (Daniel 6:10), and the early church kept set hours of prayer. A set time takes the decision out of it. You don't have to wonder whether you'll pray today, because you already know when. Start small: the Lord's Prayer slowly, a few sentences of thanks, the names of people on your mind, and a minute of quiet. Five minutes every day is a good place to start. On days you can't find the words, borrow some. The Psalms, the book of prayers and songs in the middle of the Bible, were written for exactly that, and Jesus prayed them himself.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly each morning, pausing after each line
- Through the day, pray a short breath prayer, like "God, I trust you"
- Pray a psalm on days your own words won't come
- Say grace at every meal, with whoever is at the table
- Pray out loud with your family or a friend once a week

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share when and where you've been praying this week and what made it easier or harder. Name one line of the Lord's Prayer that meant more than usual.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 2, 4, 11, 20*

03 Praying for Others

Praying for others means holding specific people before God by name, regularly. Christians call it intercession. Ask for what you know they need, like healing, work, or peace. When you don't know, ask God to bless them and help them know God is near. A short list on your phone, a card in your Bible, or a whiteboard on the refrigerator is enough to start.

The apostle Paul's letters keep telling the churches he prays for them, by name and with thanks (Philippians 1:3-4). The early Christians prayed for one another the same way. Praying for someone changes how you see them. It's hard to stay angry at a person you've prayed for every morning for a month. It also makes you pay attention. You start noticing who is sick, who is out of work, who just lost a parent, because you'll be praying for them tomorrow. And it is a simple thing to tell someone: "I prayed for you this morning." People remember hearing that. Keep the list short enough to pray in a few minutes, and add to it as people come to mind.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Keep a list of five to ten names and pray through it daily
- Pray for the church's prayer list each week
- Tell someone you prayed for them, by text or in person
- Include someone you find difficult, and keep them on the list
- Pray for one person by name each time you pass their house or workplace

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share who has been on your prayer list this week and whether praying for them changed how you see them. If there's someone you find hard to pray for, talk about what makes it hard, without naming them.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 3, 13, 16, 19*

04 The Covenant Prayer

The Covenant Prayer is a prayer of complete surrender from the Covenant Renewal service John Wesley first led in 1755. It begins "I am no longer my own, but thine," echoing Paul (1 Corinthians 6:19). Praying it regularly is a way of handing your whole life back to God, not just the parts that are easy to give.

The prayer grew out of a covenant Wesley adapted from older Puritan writers, prayed each year at the turn of the new year. It's hard to pray because it asks for everything, and some weeks you mean one line and only hope to mean the rest. Pray it for a few months anyway, and notice which lines get easier to mean.

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.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Pray it each Sunday morning, or on the first day of each month
- Find it in the hymnal and mark the page
- Pray it slowly, stopping at the line that is hardest to mean
- Pray it at a turning point: a new job, a move, a diagnosis, a new year
- Pray it aloud with your family or small group

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share which line of the Covenant Prayer is hardest for you to pray right now and why. Talk about what it would look like to mean it this week.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 8, 10, 18*

05 Fasting

Fasting is saying no to something in order to say a deeper yes to God. Most often it means food, but it can also mean social media, alcohol, sweets, or screens. Fasting doesn't earn God's favor. It teaches you, in your body, how much you need God.

Jesus assumed his followers would fast. He said "when you fast," not "if." (Matthew 6:16) The early church fasted twice a week. Wesley fasted every Friday and expected Methodists to do the same. When you fast, your body takes part in your discipleship. An empty stomach at two in the afternoon reminds you that you need something you can't produce.

If you've never fasted, start small. Hunger comes in waves and usually passes in a few minutes, so let each wave be a reminder to pray. If going without food isn't wise for you, fasting from something else is just as real.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Skip one meal on a Friday and pray during that hour
- Take a 24-hour fast from social media
- Give up one comfort for a season, such as Lent, the forty days before Easter
- Pair the fast with prayer, and give what you save to feed somebody else
- Talk to a doctor first if you have health concerns

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what you set aside this week and what surfaced between you and God when you did.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 8, 18, 20*



Presence

Weekly worship and involvement in a small group or class.

FIVE PRACTICES

Presence means showing up. Faith isn't formed in isolation. From Israel gathered at Sinai to the early church gathered for the breaking of bread, God's people have been a people who meet. When you show up to worship, to Communion, to a small group, to the homes and tables of others, you take part in something bigger than your own spiritual life. You become part of how the body of Christ is held together.

You can practice presence in worship, at the table, in a class, in honest conversation with a few people, and in showing up for the big moments in people's lives. Some ask for an hour. Some ask for an evening. All of them ask you to be with people.

If you can't get there. Some members are homebound, in a care facility, recovering from surgery, or at home caring for someone who can't be left. Presence isn't the same as attendance, and this isn't a promise you fail by being unable to travel. Worship is shared online each Sunday, so the service reaches you wherever you are. Tell a pastor, and we'll bring Communion and company too. When this congregation carries you, you still belong to it.

06 Engaged Worship

In worship you take part: you sing, pray, listen, and come to the Communion table. The early Methodists believed that what we do together on Sunday shapes who we become the rest of the week. The first Christians did the same, gathering for teaching, prayer, and the shared meal (Acts 2:42). The songs, prayers, and scripture you hear on Sunday go with you into the rest of the week.

The difference between attending and worshiping is mostly what you decide before you walk in. Two people can sit through the same hour and one of them leaves changed. The one who changed came expecting God to say something, sang the songs they didn't care for, and stayed in the room mentally when the sermon went somewhere they hadn't planned to go. You can do all of that in any service if you show up on purpose. Over years of ordinary Sundays, worshiping that way slowly shapes who you become.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Come early for the opening music, and greet somebody you don't know yet
- Sing every song, whether or not you like it
- Listen to scripture and the sermon as if God might say something to you
- Write down one thing you sense God is saying, in a notebook or a note on your phone
- Stay for the closing music, then talk with someone before you leave

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one moment from worship this week that stood out, even if you can't say why.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 2, 9, 12, 20*

07 Receiving Communion

Communion, the bread and cup Jesus shared with his followers at the Last Supper (Luke 22:14-20), is a meal where Christ meets us. Methodists practice an open table, which means everyone is welcome regardless of membership, baptism, or background. Nobody has to earn a place at the table.

In Wesley's day, most churches taught that you came to the table after you had your faith in order. Wesley argued the opposite: the table is one of the places God puts faith in order. He called Communion a "converting ordinance," a practice God uses to bring people to faith. He took Communion roughly every four or five days for most of his adult life and encouraged Methodists to receive as often as they could. So you don't have to settle your doubts before you come. Come to the table unsure, and let God meet you there.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Come forward instead of staying in the pew, if you're able
- After you receive, take a moment to pray, at the front or back at your seat
- Examine yourself before coming: where do you need forgiveness, healing, grace?
- Bring a friend who has never received before
- Remember the words "given for you" when the week gets hard

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what you brought with you to the Communion table this month, like a worry, a hurt, a decision, or a thank-you. Then share what you carried away.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 8, 14, 17, 24*

08 Bible Study or Class

A Bible study or class means learning scripture together, with a leader, a plan, and other people asking questions. It's different from reading on your own, because other people notice what you miss and someone who has studied the passage can explain what a first-century reader would have heard.

The Bereans, a group in the book of Acts, examined the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and Wesley expected Methodists to search them together as well as alone. A class gives you background a daily reading can't: who wrote a book, when, to whom, and why it matters that Paul wrote Philippians from prison. It also gives you people. Most classes become a small community, where the questions people ask are often the ones you were afraid to ask out loud. You don't need to know much to join. Newcomers' questions often help everyone, including the leader. Pick a study with an end date so you can try it without signing up for life.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Join a Sunday class, a Bible or book study, or a men's or women's group for one season
- Pick a study with a clear start and end date
- Read ahead, even a little, and bring one question
- Ask the question you think everyone else already knows the answer to
- Invite a friend to come with you the first week

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share something you learned in study this season that changed how you read a passage. Name a question about the Bible you'd like your group to take on next.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 12, 13, 22*

09 Honest Conversation

Honest conversation means meeting regularly with the same few people and telling the truth about your life and your faith. It's a means of grace, one of the ordinary ways God meets us and shapes us. Wesley built the early Methodist movement on small groups like these, where members asked one another "How is it with your soul?" and watched over one another in love. Scripture asks the same of us: confess to each other and pray for each other (James 5:16).

Those groups kept the movement going. Methodism spread across England and then America not because of Wesley's preaching alone but because everyone who responded joined a group of about a dozen people that met every week. You couldn't stay anonymous. Somebody noticed if you didn't come. Somebody asked how the praying was going and expected an answer. It's a higher bar, and it's also what many people are looking for.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Join a Grace Group, or gather a few people who will meet regularly for a season
- Make confidentiality explicit from the first conversation
- Pray for one another by name during the week
- Show up even when you don't feel like it
- Ask "How is it with your soul?" and really listen to the answer

TAKE IT DEEPER

Name one person you could meet with regularly, and one thing about your walk with God you'd want to be more honest about. Then say when you'll ask them.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 2, 4, 20, 22*

10 Showing Up for Life's Moments

Showing up for life's moments means being present for the people in your church in the big moments of their lives, happy and hard: funerals, weddings, baptisms, graduations, hospital waiting rooms. It's presence beyond Sunday morning. You don't have to say anything wise. You have to show up.

Paul told the Romans to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Jesus went to a wedding in Cana and to his friend Lazarus's tomb, where he wept even knowing what he was about to do (John 11:35). In these moments people in a church learn they can count on each other. Years later, grieving families often remember who came to be with them more than anything anyone said to them. The same is true at the other end of life. A baby's baptism with a full sanctuary tells that family they belong to more people than their own. Usually all it takes is an evening or a Saturday morning.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Go to the funeral or visitation, even if you only knew the person a little
- Sit in the hospital waiting room with a family during surgery
- Come to baptisms and stand with the congregation when we make our promises
- Send a card after a birth, a loss, a move, or a new job
- Mark the anniversary of a death on your calendar and reach out that week

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a time someone showed up for you in a hard or happy moment and what it meant. Name one person whose moment you could show up for this month.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 6, 9, 14, 25*



Gifts

Growing toward tithing, 10 percent of income, given regularly.

FIVE PRACTICES

Gifts means giving financially in trust and joy. Money isn't neutral. What you do with what you have shapes your soul, your family, and the church's mission. The Christian tradition has always treated generosity as a spiritual practice rather than a fundraising strategy.

Gifts is one promise of five. Read this section alongside Presence and Service rather than above them. A student with no income, a young family stretched thin, a household living on a fixed check: none of them are second-tier members here, and none of them are waiting to contribute until the money arrives. Showing up, teaching a class, fixing what's broken, sitting with someone who's grieving, praying for this congregation by name: those are real contributions, not substitutes for one. Give money as you're able, and grow toward tithing over the years. Give the rest of yourself now.

Generosity at McPherson First is also connectional. A portion of what's given here funds the wider work of the United Methodist Church around the world: disaster response, leadership development, theological education, mission partnerships, ministry with the most vulnerable, and support for churches where local resources are scarce. When you give to your local church, you take part in something far bigger than any one congregation.

11 First-Fruits Giving

First-fruits giving means giving first, before other expenses, as an act of trust. The phrase comes from the Old Testament, where the first portion of a harvest was offered to God before any of it was used for anything else (Proverbs 3:9). When you give first, you say with your money what you say with your mouth: God is your provider, and your security doesn't come from a balance sheet.

The order matters. Many of us start by giving what's left at the end of the month, and that's a real gift and a good place to begin. Giving first is the next step. It moves God to the front of the line, ahead of everything that feels urgent. In the Bible, farmers brought the first of the harvest, called the firstfruits, before they knew how the rest of the season would go. They gave in uncertainty rather than out of surplus. Automatic giving is the modern version of the same decision, made once, in advance, when you're thinking clearly.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Set up automatic weekly, monthly, or per-paycheck giving on the church website or in the Church Center app
- Pick a percentage of your income you can sustain and start there
- When extra money comes in, like a raise, a bonus, or a tax refund, set aside your gift before you spend the rest
- Give first, before bills or savings, rather than from what's left
- Pray over your gift as you give it, thanking God for what came in

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what your giving rhythm is and what you've noticed about your relationship with money, and with God, since you started. Nobody needs to know the amount.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 1, 16, 25*

12 Growing Toward a Tithe

A tithe is 10 percent of your income, the biblical standard for generous giving. For most people, tithing is a goal to grow toward over time rather than a starting point. Raising your giving by 1 percent a year gets you there in small steps you can keep up year after year.

The word comes from an old English word for "tenth," and the practice runs through scripture from Abraham to the prophets (Genesis 14:20; Malachi 3:10). Jesus talked about money often, and more bluntly than people expect from a subject they assume is impolite. His point was that what you do with money reveals what you actually trust, whatever you say you believe (Matthew 6:21). A percentage does something a flat amount can't: it grows when your income grows, and it eases when your income drops. A flat amount stays wherever you set it years ago.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Work out your current giving as a percentage of your income, on the back of an envelope
- Add 1 percent to your giving this year
- Add another 1 percent next year, and the year after, until you reach a tithe
- Time the increase to a clear moment: New Year, a new job, a tax refund
- Talk it over with your spouse, or with somebody who will ask you how it's going

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share where you are on the journey toward a tithe and what's making it hard or hopeful. Percentages are easier to talk about than dollars.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 5, 18, 23*

13 Gain, Save, Give All You Can

John Wesley had a three-part rule for money: gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can. It treats the whole of what you earn, keep, and spend as a matter of faith, not just what goes in the offering plate.

Wesley preached it in a sermon called "The Use of Money," on Luke 16:9. Each part has a limit built in. Gain all you can, but not at the cost of your health, your soul, or your neighbor. Save all you can, which for Wesley meant spending little on yourself, not hoarding. Then give all you can. He lived it. As his income grew from book sales, he kept living on about the same amount and gave the rest away. Most of us won't match that. The rule still asks a useful question about every part of our money: did you earn it honestly, do you spend it wisely, and where does the rest go? It works at any income, from a first paycheck to a retirement account.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Look at last month's spending and ask Wesley's three questions of it
- Set one spending limit that frees money to give
- Talk with your family about where your money comes from and where it goes
- When your income rises, keep living on what you did before and give part of the difference
- Do honest work, and pay others fairly and on time, whether it's a contractor, a babysitter, or a good tip for your server

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share which of Wesley's three parts is hardest for you right now: gaining, saving, or giving. Talk about what it would look like to treat that part as discipleship this month.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 1, 21, 23*

14 Everyday Generosity

Everyday generosity is small, direct giving that happens outside the offering plate. It's the cash you hand somebody who asks. It's picking up the tab. It's the gift card to a struggling neighbor, or the meal dropped off without a sign-up sheet. Christians have called this almsgiving for centuries. It's money you give to people you meet in the course of a day.

Jesus told his followers to give to the one who asks (Matthew 5:42). Most asks come unplanned: a person outside the gas station, a coworker short on rent, a family you know raising money for a funeral. You may wonder whether cash will really help, or worry about how it will be used. When you're unsure, a meal, a gas card, or a ride can meet the need directly. Either way, decide in advance to say yes in some form, because in the moment it's easy to talk yourself out of it. Standing in front of somebody who's asking, you'll find reasons. Decide on Monday to say yes this week, and you won't have to weigh it each time.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Carry a few small bills or gift cards earmarked for giving, and refuse to use them for anything else
- Decide in advance to say yes when you're asked, instead of deciding case by case
- Pray as you give: "God, bless this person beyond what I can offer"
- Pick up the tab at lunch when you can
- Notice the small, daily moments to give

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share somebody you helped this month, not for credit but to keep your own heart honest before God. Notice whether you almost talked yourself out of it.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 7, 15, 21*

15 Giving Thanks

Giving thanks means stopping regularly to name, specifically, what God has given you. It's gratitude you practice on purpose, whatever your mood. People who notice what they've received are freer to give.

Scripture tells us to give thanks in every circumstance (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and the Psalms are full of people listing what God has done so they won't forget it (Psalm 103). Gratitude rarely comes on its own. Most of us notice what's missing faster than what's present, and advertising is built to keep it that way. Naming three things at the end of a day, specific ones, retrains your attention. "My health" could be a start. "The friend who texted to check on me today" goes further, because a specific gift has a face and a moment, and you can thank someone for it. Over time a grateful person holds things more loosely, because they've stopped believing they earned them, and that makes it easier to give.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Each night, write down three specific things, on paper or on your phone
- Go around the dinner table and have each person name one good thing from the day
- Each day this week, thank God for one person, and name them
- When you catch yourself complaining, name one gift right alongside it
- Write a thank-you note to someone who doesn't expect one

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one blessing you noticed this week that you would have missed a year ago. Talk about how gratitude has changed, or could change, what you give.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 1, 15, 16*



Service

Regular volunteering using your unique gifts.

FIVE PRACTICES

Service means finding where you're called to serve and giving yourself to it. Wesley's second simple rule was "do good," and he meant it as a daily discipline rather than an occasional effort. Look for the place where what you can do meets what people near you need.

The five practices in this section help you find your gifts, build a rhythm of mercy, visit the people most easily forgotten, know the people next door, and pass the faith on. None of them require leaving your job or starting a nonprofit. All of them require paying attention to the people God has put in your path.

16 Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts

The first practice of service is discovering your spiritual gifts: the talents, skills, and passions God gives you to use for others. Everyone has gifts. The question is whether you've named yours, tested them by trying them out and asking others what they see, and found a place to use them.

In three separate letters, the apostle Paul uses the same picture: a body, where a hand is not a foot and neither one apologizes for it (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). The point he keeps making is that the gifts are handed out by the Spirit for the good of everyone, not handed to you for your own development. So the question isn't only what you're good at, but what this congregation needs that you can do.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Ask three friends: "When have you seen me make a real difference for someone? What do people come to me for?"
- Take a free spiritual gifts inventory, linked at mcphersonfirst.org/next, or ask the church office for a paper copy
- Volunteer in two or three different ministries over a season and notice where the time flies and you leave with more energy than you brought
- Tell a pastor or a ministry leader something like "I loved helping with the kids" or "I'm good at fixing things," and ask where that could help
- Commit to one serving role, like greeter, teacher, or a spot on a ministry team, for a season, then decide whether to keep going

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share what you think God has gifted you for and where you're testing it right now. Ask the group whether that matches what they see in you.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 10, 11, 25*

17 Acts of Mercy

Acts of mercy are the small, daily, deliberate ways you do good for the people around you. Small acts of kindness, added up over time, shape a Christian life more than grand gestures do. The goal isn't to be impressive. It's to be someone people can count on.

Jesus told a story about the final judgment, where what matters is whether people fed the hungry, welcomed strangers, and visited the sick and imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-46). The people Jesus praises are surprised. They don't remember doing anything for Jesus. They remember doing something for a hungry person. That's what acts of mercy look like. Keep doing them, without trying to guess which ones count. Mercy usually looks ordinary: a meal for a new parent, a ride to an appointment, a mowed lawn for a neighbor who can't manage it right now. Start with the people already in your path this week.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Start the day asking "God, who can I serve today?" and listen for a name or a situation that comes to mind
- Send the text, drop off the meal, make the call
- Notice the people others miss: the shut-in, the new neighbor, the kid sitting alone
- Keep a list, on paper or on your phone, of people you sense God nudging you toward
- Do one thing today, even something small

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share one act of mercy you did this week, where you saw Christ in it, and one you wish you had done.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 7, 15, 23*

18 Visiting the Sick and Homebound

Visiting the sick and homebound means going to see people who can't get out, and being fully present, even for a short visit. Wesley took it seriously enough to call it a means of grace, a way God's love reaches both the person visited and the one who comes. Whether someone is recovering from surgery, living with a long illness, unable to get out much, or near the end of life, sitting with them is something the gospel asks of every follower of Jesus (Matthew 25:36). Anyone willing to sit and listen can do it.

You don't need to know what to say. A visit isn't a performance, and nobody expects the right words. Sitting in a room with somebody and not fixing anything is uncomfortable at first, but the awkwardness usually passes sooner than you expect. God meets you there. You'll often come home having received more than you brought. Keep a first visit to twenty or thirty minutes, and ask about their life, not only their health.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Tell a pastor you'd like to visit someone who's homebound, and ask who would welcome a visit
- Call before you visit so it's welcome and well-timed
- Bring a small thing: a card, last Sunday's bulletin, a flower, a photo
- Sit close enough to be heard, put your phone away, and listen more than you talk
- Before you leave, offer a short, simple prayer, and it's fine if they say no

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a visit you made and where you sensed God in the room. If you've been meaning to go and haven't, say who and say when.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 3, 6, 21*

19 Knowing Your Neighbors

Knowing your neighbors means learning the names, stories, and needs of the people who live closest to you. When someone asked Jesus "Who is my neighbor?" he told the story of the Good Samaritan, a stranger who stopped on the road to care for a wounded man that others had passed by (Luke 10:25-37). The people closest to you, whether next door or a mile down the road, are where most of us can start.

Knowing your neighbors starts small, in town or in the country. Wesley saw every person around him as his to care for, and he said the world was his parish. For most of us, that care starts with a block or a stretch of country road. Service starts there too, because you can't take a meal to someone whose name you don't know. So learn names and write them down. Wave when you drive by. Introduce yourself when a new family moves in. Over a few months you'll learn who just had surgery, who lives alone, and who could use a ride to the doctor. And they'll learn they can call you.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Learn the names of the eight households closest to yours, in town or in the country
- Write the names down, and pray for them
- Introduce yourself to anyone who moves in, with something to eat
- Offer a specific help: mowing, a ride, picking up groceries
- Host a simple gathering on your porch or in your driveway

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share the name of a neighbor you got to know better this season and what you learned. Talk about one need near you that God may be asking you to meet.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 3, 6, 7, 19*

20 Teaching and Mentoring

Teaching and mentoring means sharing what you know with someone younger or newer to faith, whether a class of children, a confirmation student, or one friend over coffee. Every Christian was taught by someone. This practice is your turn to pass it on.

Paul mentored Timothy and told him to pass on what he learned to others (2 Timothy 2:2). Kids and teens remember who showed up every week longer than any lesson. To mentor, meet regularly, ask good questions, tell the truth about your own faith, and pray for them by name. You'll learn as much as you teach. Between adults, mentoring usually starts with an invitation, not the word "mentor": "Want to grab coffee once a month? I'd love to hear how your faith is going." If you'd like a mentor, ask the same way: "I admire how you live your faith. Would you meet with me sometime?" With kids and teens, the natural place to mentor is a program like confirmation, where adults serve as a team.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Volunteer as a confirmation mentor for a season
- Teach or co-teach a Sunday school class, even for a few weeks
- Meet monthly with one adult newer to faith for coffee and conversation
- Share a story about your faith with a grandchild or a young person in your life
- Think of who helped your faith grow, and do for someone else what they did for you

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share who taught you the faith and what they did that stuck. Name one younger person you could encourage in faith this season.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 11, 14, 22*

Witness

Naturally inviting others and living your faith visibly.

FIVE PRACTICES

Witness means sharing your faith through words and actions. The Greek word behind "witness" is *martys*, and it gave us the word "martyr." A witness is somebody who tells what they've seen, sometimes at cost. Witness asks you to live, work, and speak in a way that points beyond yourself.

The five practices in this section are the everyday forms of Christian witness: telling your story, inviting somebody to come along, living the three simple rules, forgiving and making peace, and keeping your word. Most witness is ordinary: showing up and speaking honestly, year after year.

21 Telling Your Story

Witness starts with being able to say what God has done in your life. A few honest minutes of telling is enough: where God was at work before you knew it, when you said yes (even tentatively), and what faith looks like for you now. Your story doesn't need to impress anyone.

Most people who freeze at this are comparing themselves to somebody with a dramatic conversion, and assuming a story without a rock-bottom moment isn't worth telling. Scripture holds both: Paul was knocked to the ground by a blinding light (Acts 9:1-9), and two disciples on the road to Emmaus only slowly recognized Jesus walking beside them (Luke 24:13-35). Most stories look more like Emmaus, and those are easier for others to relate to. The man Jesus healed in John 9 got badgered by experts and finally said he didn't know the answers to their questions, only that he was blind and now he sees (John 9:25). That was enough. Yours is enough.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Jot down a few notes, on paper or in your phone: where God was before you noticed, when you said yes, what faith looks like now
- Tell it out loud to a trusted friend first; three minutes is plenty
- Practice until it feels natural rather than memorized
- Update it every year or two as the story keeps unfolding
- Make sure it ends on what God is doing, not on you

TAKE IT DEEPER

Take turns telling your faith stories over a few weeks. Listen for what God is doing in each other, and say what you heard.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 5, 14, 17*

22 The Invitation

One natural form of witness is asking somebody to come along with you to worship, a group, or a church event. Most people who join a church were invited by somebody they trust. You don't have to be a preacher or win an argument. Just ask. When Philip told his friend Nathanael about Jesus, he didn't argue. He said, "Come and see" (John 1:46).

When people are asked why they first walked into a church, the answer is usually the same: a friend asked. It's rarely the sign, the website, or even the sermon. So asking is the part that matters, even when you're unsure how it will go. Here's what might help: a no isn't a rejection of you or of God, and it's often a not yet. People say yes to a specific invitation to a specific thing far more often than to a general standing welcome. "Come sometime" almost never works. "Come with me Sunday, I'll save you a seat" often does.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Pray for one name this week, and wait until somebody comes to mind
- Pick a particular event: a worship service, Christmas Eve, a small group, a service project
- Ask plainly: "I'd love for you to come with me to ____. Can I pick you up?"
- Make it easy: drive together, sit with them, follow up after
- Thank them for considering it, whether they came or not

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share who you invited to worship or a group this season and what happened, including the invitations that didn't lead to a yes. Those are worth talking about too.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 9, 13, 19, 24*

23 Living the Three Simple Rules

John Wesley, who started the Methodist movement, gave Methodists three simple rules for everyday life. In today's words: do no harm, do good, and stay close to God. They're short enough to fit on a sticky note, and that's on purpose.

Wesley wrote them in 1743, echoing Paul's "hate evil, and hold on to what is good" (Romans 12:9). What makes them useful is the order. The first rule stops you before you hurt someone, like holding back the sharp reply. The second sends you to help, like checking on the neighbor you've been meaning to call. The third, through prayer, worship, and scripture, gives you the strength for both. Plenty of well-meaning Christians throw themselves into doing good but forget to stop and ask whether they're doing harm, and leave a trail of hurt behind a lot of good intentions. Plenty of others keep the first faithfully and mistake causing no damage for following Jesus. Either way, without the third, people wear out. Ask all three, in order, before you send the text, take the job, or say yes to one more commitment, and most decisions get simpler.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Memorize them, so they're available to you in any moment
- Use them as the questions of your evening prayer
- Teach them to your kids
- Before a hard decision, ask all three: harm? good? closeness to God?
- Confess what you missed, receive grace, and start fresh tomorrow

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share which of the three is hardest for you right now and what's making it hard. Most people find the answer changes by season.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 10, 15, 21*

24 Forgiving and Reconciling

Forgiving and reconciling means releasing what others owe you and doing what you can to repair broken relationships. Jesus put it ahead of worship: if you remember at the altar that someone has something against you, go make things right first (Matthew 5:23-24).

Forgiveness is a decision to stop holding a wrong against someone, often made again and again. When Peter asked whether forgiving seven times was enough, Jesus answered with a much bigger number (Matthew 18:21-22). Forgiving others often starts with receiving God's forgiveness yourself. Forgiveness doesn't mean saying it didn't matter, and it isn't the same as trust, which has to be rebuilt.

Reconciliation takes two people and isn't always possible or safe, but you can forgive on your own. Where repair is possible, reconciling also includes peacemaking: being the one who lowers the temperature when people around you are pulling apart. When people here disagree and still come to the same table, the town sees that too.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Name someone you need to forgive, and pray for them daily
- Apologize first, specifically, without explaining it away
- When a conversation heats up, lower your voice and ask a question
- Refuse to pass along a story that makes someone else look bad
- Ask a pastor or trusted friend to help with a reconciliation that feels stuck

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a time you forgave someone or were forgiven and what changed afterward. If there's a relationship you need to repair, say what one first step might be.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 4, 8, 17, 24*

25 Keeping Your Word

Keeping your word means doing what you said you would, so that your yes means yes. Jesus taught that his followers shouldn't need oaths, because their plain word should be enough (Matthew 5:33-37). When people can count on you, they take your faith more seriously.

Psalm 15:4 describes the person who keeps a promise even when it hurts. That's the hard part. Keeping your word is easy when it costs nothing. It's tested when the better offer comes along, when you said you'd serve and it's raining, when you promised to call and you're tired. Most broken promises are overcommitments, made in good faith and dropped later. So this practice starts before the promise: say yes less often, and mean it when you do. Show up on time. Return what you borrowed. Pay what you owe. Over the years, people notice, and some of them start to wonder what makes you that way.

WAYS TO TRY IT

- Before you say yes, check whether you can actually do it
- Keep a list of what you've promised, on paper or on your phone, and review it weekly
- When you can't keep a commitment, say so early and plainly
- Show up on time, as a way of honoring other people
- Finish what you start, or hand it off clearly

TAKE IT DEEPER

Share a promise you kept this week that cost you something, or one you broke and what happened. Talk about where saying yes less often might help you keep your word.

ROOTED IN *Beliefs 5, 13, 18*

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