

FOLLOWING JESUS LOVING PEOPLE SHARING GRACE

Sermon Series



Series Overview

This four-week series explores the Arkansas Conference's mission statement: "**Following Jesus. Loving People. Sharing Grace.**"

Each week builds intentionally on the last, inviting congregations not only to reflect on Christian discipleship but to practice it together in worship and daily life.

Like the rhythm of Ordinary Time, this series moves from call to relationship to embodiment and finally to lived practice:

- We begin by **Following Jesus**, responding to Christ's invitation to walk a new way.
- We deepen that call by **Loving People**, reflecting the love we have first received.
- We are then sent into the world **Sharing Grace**, living out faith through action, generosity, and justice.
- We conclude by **Living the Way**, putting faith into practice as disciples who carry Christ's love and grace into everyday life.



Week One: Following Jesus

Primary Scriptures

- Matthew 4:18–20
- Luke 9:23–24

- John 8:12
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Planning Notes

This week introduces the heart of discipleship: Jesus' invitation to follow. In Scripture, following Jesus is never passive. It is a decisive turning away from darkness and toward light, from self-centered living toward a life shaped by love and purpose.

As this series begins, consider visual and musical elements that reinforce movement, calling, and light. Jesus does not call people once they are ready or perfected; he calls them exactly as they are. Worship this week should feel invitational, grounding, and courageous.

Preaching Notes by Rev. Michael Roberts, Elder (with additions)

Matthew 4:12-22

In the fourth chapter of Matthew, we witness the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Matthew provides his own commentary. First, we learn that Jesus moves from Nazareth to Capernaum, a place known for its openness to the Gentile world. It was a major trade route and known as the "Galilee of the Gentiles," as we see in the passage. Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah to set the context. From this place, light will dawn. That's how Matthew sets the stage.

We then hear the first words from Jesus. He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Repent! The word means "to turn." We can imagine Jesus literally pointing them in a different direction. "You have been walking this way – into darkness, into the shadow of death; I invite you to turn into the light." Using scripture as a whole, there are so many words that can be used to illuminate this new reality. The word love would be at the top of the list.

Jesus then takes the next steps – literally. As he walks along the Sea of Galilee, he sees some fishermen and calls to them. He says, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of people."

"Follow" is the next keyword. The Greek word appears 90 times in the New Testament. It contains the prefix "a," suggesting a union or joining. This prefix is joined to the word "keleutheos," meaning road, path, or way. In this context, the word means so much more than passively tagging along. The word points to a union or commitment to a "way" with the hope that this way will lead to something good.

We can note that the word "theo" is contained within the larger word. This is the word for "God." Commentaries downplay a direct connection here, saying that these letters are just part of the word. With some theological license, however, it is not far-fetched to suggest more. This invitation from Jesus is to join him in a way that leads to life. This path leads to God.

These future apostles leave their nets and follow – and do so "immediately." In a sermon, it may be worth reflecting on what might motivate one to make this leap of faith. Something about their lives made them long for more – boredom, lack of meaning, darkness. They "turned" and saw something in Jesus, and in the light that he illuminated, that made them want to follow.

In all of the passages for this series, the word "follow" is part of an expanded call, illuminating a larger purpose and promise. In the next passage, the invitation to follow is connected to the

call to “take up your cross.” In the passage from John, we read, “Follow me, and you will have the light of life.” In this passage from Matthew, Jesus adds the words, “and I will make you fishers of people.”

It is noteworthy that Jesus intentionally connects the invitation to who they are and what they know. The call is to take what they know and to make it holy, to use their gifts to serve a larger purpose. We belittle this calling when we only use it as an admonition to “invite people to church.” That can be a part of it, but so much more is implied. The context of this whole passage points to an expansion of spirit and connection, and of our capacity to love. We are invited to unite with Christ along a way, a path, a pilgrimage, that leads us out of darkness and into the light. We are all called into this holy pursuit.

Luke 9:21-27

This is a crucial point in the gospel. If something is crucial, then it is extremely important. It is a matter of life and death. In fact, part of the word “crucial” is included in “crucifixion.” This message was crucial for the disciples. For the first time, Jesus tells his disciples what will happen when they arrive in Jerusalem. He says he will soon “undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and be killed.” He goes on to say that after three days he will rise again, but I'm not sure anyone heard this.

We know from other gospel accounts that the disciples were shocked. Peter even reprimands Jesus, telling him that he must be mistaken. The disciples had a different kind of messiah in mind: one who would conquer Rome and restore the earthly kingdom of Israel. Prosperity, honor, and glory—that's what a messiah should bring. But here, Jesus says something very different. He talks about suffering and sacrifice. What could these things have to do with being the Messiah? Well, the answer is everything. In a sermon, making this point is crucial to the sharing of the gospel. and love. Love creates a place for God to come in and dwell. For all who are called to discipleship, this is crucial, for our sake, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of the world.

When John Wesley preached on this passage, he compared and contrasted his view with the view of Calvinists/Predestinationists, who were sharing a different perspective at the time. Wesley describes the call to follow and to take up our cross daily as the “grand doctrine of Christianity.” It is that crucial. There were others, however, who claimed that this saying could lead us into “works-righteousness.” The message was that Jesus suffered so that we don't have to. This word in scripture was for those at that time, not for us. Wesley called this view a declaration of war on the gospel.

For us, as United Methodists, faith is more than just “believing.” Faith is believing by following. And following is so much more than walking behind Jesus and trusting in him to do it all. (See the definition and analysis of “follow” above). As followers, we actively seek and strive to use words from Jesus. As we follow, we come to be called apostles or those who are sent. We are also called friends. We are called to be the Body of Christ in the world. We are called to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. We are called to be “living sacrifices.” To follow means much more than to tag along. It is a call to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily.¹

Another important question is this: what is your cross? Sometimes we hear people talk of their “cross to bear,” referring to some personal pain or problem. Here, Jesus has something more in mind. Our cross is what we do to bring life into the world. It is our living sacrifice, where we live in such a way that we help others to live more fully. This is the way of life – abundant and eternal. ²

To put it as directly as possible. Life is not found in things. It is not found in self-focus. It is not found in gaining the whole world, as Jesus says. We find true life when we are willing to lose our lives in service

Michael Roberts

John 8:12

John's Gospel adds yet another layer: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness." Following Jesus is not only about obedience; it is about illumination. Christ's light exposes what binds us, reveals what is true, and shows us the way forward. The promise is not that the path will be easy, but that it will not be walked in darkness.

For Wesleyans, discipleship is not static or instantaneous. It is a journey of grace—prevenient grace that calls us before we are ready, justifying grace that claims us as God's own, and sanctifying grace that shapes us over time. We follow not because we are finished products, but because God is actively at work in us, transforming our hearts and lives as we walk with Christ.

This week invites honest reflection. Jesus still calls ordinary people in ordinary moments. The question is not whether Jesus is calling, but whether we are willing to respond. *What nets—habits, fears, assumptions, comforts—might we be holding that keep us from following Jesus more fully?*

1 See Rebekah Simon-Peter, Believe Like Jesus: Rising from Faith in Jesus to the Faith of Jesus (Market Square Books, 2024). In this thought-provoking book, we are challenged to move beyond thinking of ourselves as disciples or followers only. We are called to be apostles—sent out as commissioned agents to trust in what Christ trusts in and to bring healing and hope to the world. We are called to believe "like" Jesus, not only "in" Jesus.

2 This analysis can be found in the forthcoming book, Awakening Through Wilderness: Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, inspired by the teachings of John Wesley, Michael Roberts, with Lauren Delano Grosskopf, Market Square Books, to be published in 2025 (this fall).

Liturgical Resources

Call to Worship by Rev. Greg Burkes, Elder

Leader: Jesus calls us just like we are: lost, least, lonely, saved, holy, excited, confused, angry, skeptical, hopeful, happy, trustful, depressed, sad, grieving, contented, joyful, or elated to come and follow him.

People: Come, let us follow Jesus and worship God!

Leader: Jesus commands us to love God with all that we have and to love everyone as much as we love God. Let us show our love for God by how much we are determined to be kind, caring, and merciful towards all.

People: Come, let us love like Jesus and let us worship God!

Leader: Jesus shared meals with tax collectors, prostitutes, pharisees, believers, and unbelievers alike. May our churches be a place where we can share a meal with all people – believers, unbelievers, tax collectors, prostitutes, pharisees, and people with whom we do not see eye to eye.

People: Come, let us share the love of Jesus and worship God!

Call to Worship (Option 2)

Leader: The grace of God has been poured into our lives.

People: Freely given, richly abundant, overflowing with love.

Leader: God calls us to let that grace flow beyond ourselves.

People: To serve with compassion, to give with generosity, and to live with justice.

Leader: As God's light breaks forth through acts of mercy,

All: Let us worship the God who sends us to share grace with the world.

Call to Worship (Option 3)

Leader: God invites us into a faith that moves beyond words.

People: A faith made visible through love, generosity, and justice.

Leader: We have received grace more than we could ever earn.

People: Now we are called to share that grace with others.

Leader: Come, let us be strengthened together by God's Spirit,

All: And worship the One who calls us to live and share grace. Amen.

Opening Prayer by Rev. Claire Newbill, Elder

Holy One,

Center our hearts and minds on you today. Melt away the constant rumbling of voices that are not yours. Allow worship to remind us of your invitation, your love, and your experiences.

Jesus, as a human, you called us. You invited us to sail out of our smug harbors into the uncharted waters of faith. You called us to wander off from our predictable paths to follow you into the unpredictable footsteps of the kingdom. You called us to leave the comfort of our homes and accompany you into the uncomfortable neighborhoods we usually avoid

Son of God, you are gentle and humble of heart, full of compassion and peace. You lived in poverty and suffered persecution for the cause of justice. Grant us the courage to take up our cross and follow you. Shake us of our complacency so that we may live with a sense of urgency to radically be the change you call us to be.

We seek your light, God. We seek light in our lives, our neighborhoods, our families, our work, in our nation, and in the world. May worship today shine light on us and chase away the darkness. Fill us, Lord, with the light of your truth. Transform us into shining examples of your amazing grace, redeeming love, and life-changing power. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon by Rev. Kelly Giese, Elder

Prayer of Confession

Leader: O Lord, we confess to you that we are not always passionate about following you. Perhaps it is our reticence to leave our nets, our lives, our preferences behind, maybe it is our fear of stumbling and faltering as we go.

People: Forgive us, we pray.

Leader: Lord, we confess to you that our hesitancy to follow is also tied up in our hesitancy to deny ourselves, to commit ourselves daily to the work you call us to.

People: Forgive us, we pray.

Leader: Lord, we confess to you that we often find it difficult to forgive ourselves, to release into your compassionate heart our faults and failures so that we might receive your overwhelming love.

People: Forgive us, we pray.

Leader: And so we come today to sit in the brilliance of your light, to open our ears to your call, and to lay aside our hesitancy. Help us to dare to ask for your help so that you, Lord, may surprise us with your grace.

O light of the world, shine upon us with your forgiving grace, with your loving kindness which never fails. May we arise today to walk with you, with steady strides and willing hearts. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Leader: *Hear these words as Christ's invitation to forgiveness:* "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life."

All: Amen.

Offertory Prayer by Rev. Kenny Lee, Associate Member of the ARUMC

Gracious and Calling God,

You have looked upon us, just as Jesus once looked upon the fishermen by the sea, saying, "Come, follow me." They left behind home and security, not fully knowing the cost of discipleship, yet offering themselves wholly for the sake of Christ.

We, too, long to follow Jesus and to answer the Good News with our lives. You invite us to take up our cross, to deny ourselves, and to walk the way of faithful discipleship. Though the way of

the cross can be daunting, you lead us from shadows into your marvelous light.

So now we bring our gifts—our treasure, our time, our very selves—readily, joyfully, expectantly—in answer to Your call. Bless and use them to shine Your light in a world that still knows too much darkness. Shape us into living witnesses: light-bearers, justice-seekers, and bridge-builders, that Your kingdom may become visible among us.

Through our giving and our living, may others hear the call of Christ and choose to follow. We pray in the strong name of Jesus, Amen.

Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs by Rev. Danita Paige, Licensed Local Pastor (with additions)

Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal)

- **Love Divine, All Loves Excelling** (UMH 384)
- **Lord, I Want to Be a Christian** (UMH 402)
- **They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love** (TFWS 2223)

Worship Songs

- Reckless Love
 - Goodness of God
 - Come As You Are
-

Benediction by Rev. Tamira Valley, Licensed Local Pastor

Go forth in the light of Christ,
the One who calls us, saying, “Follow Me.”
As Peter and Andrew left their nets at once to walk in His way,
may you lay down whatever holds you back
and rise to follow Him with courage and joy.

Walk in His light,
and you will not stumble in darkness,
for He has promised the light of life to all who believe.

And as you follow Christ,
may His light shine through you—
leading others to hope, to peace, and to the everlasting love of God.

Go now as disciples,
bearing the light of Christ into the world.

Amen.



Week Two: Loving People

Primary Scriptures

- Psalm 36:7–9
- Luke 10:26–28
- John 13:34–35
- 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Planning Notes

This week moves from the call to follow Jesus into the relational heart of discipleship. Scripture is clear: love is not an optional extra to faith but its defining mark. We love because God has first loved us, and that love becomes visible in how we treat one another.

Preaching Notes by Rev. Haley Jones Wells, Deacon (w/additions)

Loving people runs like a golden thread through all of Scripture—woven from the steadfast love of God and extending into the call for us to embody that love in our daily lives. God’s love does not begin with us, and it does not end with us. It is received as a gift and lived as a witness, shaping how we understand ourselves, our neighbors, and our call as disciples.

Psalm 36:7–9

The psalmist proclaims, “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.” God’s love is not distant or conditional; it is abundant, sheltering, and life-giving—like a fountain that never runs dry.

God’s love is for you. Too often, in serving others, we forget that God’s steadfast, ever-present love is also meant for us. At our core, we are worthy and beloved. God longs for us to return home to God’s refuge, because it is only within God’s shelter that we find the strength and hope to love others well. Loving people begins not with effort, but with resting in the assurance that we are already held.

Luke 10:26–28

Jesus answers the question of life with God simply and directly: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind—and love your neighbor as yourself.” This is not a suggestion; it is the heartbeat of discipleship.

To live inside God’s love is to allow that love to shape every part of who we are. Loving God and loving neighbor cannot be separated. When we love God fully, love necessarily flows outward toward others. Eternal life is not only a future promise; it is a present way of living formed by love—a love that engages both devotion and action.

John 13:34–35

Jesus raises the standard when he says, “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” The measure of love is no longer our own capacity or comfort, but Christ’s sacrificial, unconditional love poured out for us and for the world.

This love is not always comfortable. Loving others as God loves us means stepping into the messiness of their lives, just as God steps into ours. Love is not about agreement, and even the deepest love requires healthy boundaries. To love as followers of Jesus is to stand secure in God’s love, trusting that through us, others may come to know our loving God.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Paul gives language to what this love looks like when lived out: love that is patient and kind, not envious or boastful, not keeping score of wrongs, but rejoicing in truth. Love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This is not love in words only, but love that reshapes how we treat one another, how we forgive, how we serve, and how we live in community. It is love that reveals the very heart of our Creator and shows others that they, too, are worthy of belonging.

John Wesley understood love as both gift and responsibility. God’s love meets us before we are ready, claims us in Christ, and continues shaping us over time. When we respond in faith, we find that love becomes less an obligation and more a natural response because of Christ’s perfecting love. The most unique witness we United Methodists can share in the world is we trust that through Christ, we are being made perfect in love in this life. Holiness, then, is boldly sharing God’s love faithfully in relationship with God and neighbor right here and now, fully immersed in the daily minutiae of life. We trust that God’s love is shaping us each moment of each day so that we can fearlessly share God’s perfect, saving love with those who desperately need it.

So today we face a simple but challenging question: If God’s love is our refuge, and Christ’s love is our command, how will we embody that love in the places we live, work, and serve? What if your love is the only glimpse of God’s love someone receives? That kind of love is not merely comforting—it is transformative and life-changing. May we take the risk of loving boldly, deeply, and without hesitation, so that others may come to know our gracious God through the love they see in us.

Liturgical Resources

Call to Worship by Rev. John Noggle, Elder

Leader: Arise, O Lord, O God; lift up your hand and forget not the afflicted.

People: You, O Lord, hear the heart's desire of the meek.

Leader: You strengthen every heart that calls upon You.

People: We come to sing praise to You, O Lord, who dwells in heaven and brings order to all Your creation.

Leader: Be gracious to us, O God, and fill us with Your love and mercy,

People: Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and by the power of Your Holy Spirit living in us.

Leader: Let the light of Your Son guide us this day,

People: In all wisdom and truth of Your Word.

Leader: Form us into all You have created us to be,

All: In Your likeness and Spirit, for all time. We praise You in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Call to Worship (Option 2)

Leader: Jesus gathers us in with love beyond measure.

People: Love that heals, restores, and makes us whole.

Leader: By this love, the world will know we belong to Christ.

People: Let us worship God and learn to love one another. Amen.

Call to Worship (Option 3)

Leader: God's love surrounds us like a sheltering wing.

People: We rest in that love and rise to share it.

Leader: Jesus commands us to love one another.

All: Come, let us worship the God who teaches us how to love. Amen.

Opening Prayer by Rev. Alyssa Kuebler, Elder

God of Love, as we gather in this place to worship, help us to take refuge in your loving presence. Give us courage and power as we seek to love you with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. May the stories and songs we share this day empower us to live inside of your magnificent and all-encompassing love, and may our cups overflow with this love so that we might share it with all of your children.

We ask these things in your holy and loving name. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon by Rev. Michael Bolin, Elder (w/additions)

Almighty God, the author of faith and giver of the fruit of repentance,

We come to You in humble submission that we fail to love our neighbor as You love us. Your love is unconditional. That is what makes it so transformational. Our ideas, concepts, and beliefs shape the conditional love we often practice. The affections of our heart drive our motivation, posture our character, and form our witness.

Almighty One, transform our hearts into hearts after Yours. Guide us in what motivates You. Renew our minds in scriptural holiness so that our character reflects that of the integrity and dignity of Jesus Christ.

Help us to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit over the voices of apathy, of envy, of prejudice, of empowerment, and of all things that seek to divert my will from Yours.

We invite you, LORD, to guide us in Your love so that our lives are the Word made flesh for the sake of God's reign.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news:

God, the author of faith and the giver of repentance, is rich in mercy and steadfast in love.

In Jesus Christ, our hearts are not left unchanged—they are renewed, forgiven, and made new.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, God transforms our affections, renews our minds in holiness, and restores us to walk in the love of Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Offertory Prayer by Rev. Danita Paige, Licensed Local Pastor

Eternal and Loving God, how precious is Your steadfast love, O Lord! In You we find refuge, renewal, and the fountain of life that never runs dry. You have loved us with a love that is patient, kind, and enduring. A love that bears all things and believes all things.

As we bring our tithes and offerings today, we do so not out of obligation, but out of love. We give because You first loved us. We give because we long to share that love with our neighbors, near and far.

Use these gifts, O God, to build bridges of compassion, to heal what is broken, and to remind the world that Your grace still abides among us. Teach us to love with the heart of Jesus, freely, faithfully, and fearlessly, so that others may see You through our witness.

Bless every giver, every gift, and every act of love that flows from this moment. May what we offer today become a living testimony of what it means to follow Jesus, love people, and share grace.

In the name of the One who loved us first and loves us still, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs by Rev. Pam Estes, Elder

Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal & The Faith We Sing)

- **Jesu, Jesu** (UMH 432)
- **Ubi Caritas** (TFWS 2179)
- **When We Are Living** (UMH 356)

Worship Songs

- Love One Another (John Bell)
 - Less Like Me (Zach Williams)
 - Bigger Table (Matt Maher)
-

Benediction by Rev. Pam Estes, Elder

Now let us go forth, loving all the people! With all our hearts, souls, and strength, let us show mercy and grace in the fullness of our love in compassionate action. Be of good courage, trust God, and love!



Week Three: Sharing Grace

Primary Scriptures

- Isaiah 58:6–8
- 2 Corinthians 9:8
- Romans 1:11–12
- Philemon 4–7

Planning Notes

This third week moves the congregation outward. Having followed Jesus and learned to love people, we now turn to what it means to **share grace**, not as something we possess, but as something God continually pours out through us.

Isaiah 58 reminds us that grace is never abstract. It loosens the bonds of injustice, feeds the hungry, shelters the unhoused, and allows God’s light to break forth in real and tangible ways. Grace is received personally but always expressed communally.

Worship this week should feel missional and hopeful, emphasizing generosity, justice, and encouragement. This is a sending week—one that reminds us that grace multiplies when it is shared.

Preaching Notes by Rev. John Fleming, Elder (with additions)

Grace is one of the most familiar—and most easily misunderstood—words in the Christian vocabulary. For some, grace is the blessing offered before a meal. For others, grace describes something smooth and beautiful—a figure skater gliding effortlessly through the air and around the turns. Sometimes we even use the word humorously when someone slips and falls, and a bystander says, “Hello, Grace!” Of course, there is also the biblical understanding of grace: God’s unmerited and unearned favor and kindness.

We often speak of grace as something we receive: God’s unearned love, forgiveness, and mercy. Scripture affirms this, but it does not stop there. Grace, once received, refuses to remain private. It moves outward, shaping how we live, give, and relate to others.

The common thread running through all four texts is sharing.

Isaiah 58:6–8

In **Isaiah 58**, the prophet calls God’s people to a faith that is lived out through action. Isaiah urges the sharing of bread with the hungry, opening homes to the homeless, clothing those who lack clothing, and even sharing oneself with family—“not to hide yourself from your own kin.” Grace, in this vision, is not hidden or private. It is embodied in justice, generosity, and compassion. When this kind of grace is shared, Isaiah says, light breaks forth like the dawn, healing springs up quickly, and God’s presence becomes visible in the world.

2 Corinthians 9:8

Paul echoes this same movement in his letter to the church in Corinth. In **2 Corinthians 9:8**, Paul reminds believers that God has provided abundantly enough of everything so that they may share abundantly in every good work. Grace is not something to be hoarded. God supplies what we need so that we can participate joyfully in God’s work of blessing others.

Romans 1:11–12

In **Romans 1:11–12**, Paul then writes to the church in Rome, a church he did not plant. Among his first words are these: “I long to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened.” Paul immediately makes clear that this sharing is mutual—that they will encourage one another through their shared faith. Grace flows both ways. It strengthens relationships and builds up the whole body of Christ.

Philemon 4–7

Finally, Paul writes to **Philemon** while under house arrest in Rome. This brief letter offers a deeply personal picture of shared grace. Paul gives thanks for Philemon’s love and faith, noting that the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through him. Grace here is relational and restorative. It invites reconciliation, hospitality, and the courage to see others not according to social standing, but as siblings in Christ.

Across these passages, we see grace shared in many forms: when we share bread with the hungry and clothing with those in need; when we share in the ministry to which we are all called; when we share spiritual gifts and encouragement; and when we share Christ with others.

Sharing grace is not about extraordinary heroics. It is about faithfulness in ordinary relationships and daily choices. It is about recognizing that what God has poured into us - love, forgiveness, hope, encouragement, and resources - is meant to flow outward.

For Wesleyans, grace is never passive or static. John Wesley understood grace as God’s active presence at work in the world and in human lives. Prevenient grace goes before us, awakening our hearts to God’s love. Justifying grace reconciles us to God. Sanctifying grace then moves us outward, shaping our lives to reflect Christ’s love in the world.

Wesley insisted that there is **no holiness but social holiness**. Grace is made real not only in personal piety but in acts of mercy, justice, generosity, and encouragement. The means of grace: prayer, Scripture, communion, and fasting, are not ends in themselves; they form us so that grace may be shared.

The question before us is simple, yet challenging: **Where is God inviting us to share grace so that others may experience life?**

Liturgical Resources

Call to Worship (Based on Isaiah 58) by Rev. Jennie Williams, Elder

Leader: God calls us not just to belief—but to a faith marked by action,

People: to break chains of injustice, set the oppressed free, and share grace with a hurting world.

Leader: We worship God with open hearts and open hands—

People: We feed hungry spirits and hungry bodies, welcome strangers, and to share love in every way we can.

Leader: Then God's light will shine like the dawn, and healing will come quickly!

All: Let us worship the God of justice, mercy, and grace—as we carry that grace into the world.

Call to Worship (Option 2)

Leader: The grace of God has been poured into our lives.

People: Freely given, richly abundant, overflowing with love.

Leader: God calls us to let that grace flow beyond ourselves.

People: To serve with compassion, to give with generosity, and to live with justice.

Leader: As God's light breaks forth through acts of mercy,

All: Let us worship the God who sends us to share grace with the world.

Call to Worship (Option 3)

Leader: God invites us into a faith that moves beyond words.

People: A faith made visible through love, generosity, and justice.

Leader: We have received grace more than we could ever earn.

People: Now we are called to share that grace with others.

Leader: Come, let us be strengthened together by God's Spirit,

All: And worship the One who calls us to live and share grace.

Opening Prayer by Rev. Reggie Russell, Elder

Dear God, according to your servant Moses, who said, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” We take this time to praise you and acknowledge you as our God, who is present with us, as you have been with all generations before us and will be with generations after us.

Your grace is a part of your divine character that you freely give to all of your children, and for that, we give you thanks. Help us and teach us, most holy God, to openly share the grace that you freely give to us with others. We trust that you will guide the way and that the works of your hands will be manifested upon all of us, so that glory will be evident through the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon by Rev. Lauren DeLano, Elder

God of Light, though your grace is extravagant and unending, we often do not extend your grace to others. We love to receive this gift of grace ourselves, but the idea that those around us would be afforded the same gift challenges us. Forgive us, we pray, when we prefer the darkness and division of the world to your light. Forgive us when we do not extend your love and grace to those we deem unworthy. Remind us that we are your children, a reflection of all you are and all you do. Let us be an extension of your grace and a place of encouragement rather than judgment for those who feel undeserving or unworthy of your grace, O God. Increase our faith. Give us the strength to believe your grace is abundant and not something to be hoarded or given out selectively.

Assurance of Pardon

For the good news is that when your grace is shared far and wide, you will provide abundant blessings in the lives of those who offer grace and those who will receive it. Amen.

Offertory Prayer by Rev. Katye Chambers, Deacon

Holy and Gracious God,

Your grace provides us with every blessing in abundance,

and in your goodness, you provide us with everything that we need.

Help us hear and respond to your call to share that grace with others

Through the giving of our tithes and offerings.

Bless our gifts, that they may be used to provide bread to the hungry

and clothes for the naked.

Help us to live our lives as an offering of grace to all your people, that we may be used

to loose the bonds of injustice and let the oppressed go free.

Let your light break forth in us and through us,
God of grace and love,
as we seek to be faithful with the gifts you have entrusted to our care.
In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs by Amy Ezell, Certified Lay Minister

Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal)

- **Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing** (UMH 400)
- **Here I Am, Lord** (UMH 593)
- **Jesus, United by Thy Grace** (UMH 561)

Worship Songs

- Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)
 - Shout to the Lord
 - Come Jesus Come
-

Benediction by Kathy Conley, ARUMC Lay Leader

May Your love for our Savior Jesus overflow in all the parts of your life. And may the God of all Creation pour out extravagant blessings to fill you with the boldness to share, forgive, care and love. In other words, be like Jesus as you speak truth and action to the words, “Here I Am, Lord.”

Go now in the peace of Christ. Amen.



Week Four: Living the Way

Developed by the Arkansas Conference Board of Discipleship

Theme

Putting It All into Practice

Suggested Focus Scripture

- James 1:22–27
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Micah 6:8

Planning Notes

This final week serves as a **capstone and commissioning** for the series. After reflecting on what it means to follow Jesus, love people, and share grace, this week invites the congregation to embody these commitments in daily life. The emphasis is not on adding new information, but on integration—helping people see how faith becomes practice.

Worship this week should feel both reflective and forward-looking. Consider highlighting testimonies, ministry opportunities, or tangible next steps that allow people to live out the mission together. This is a moment to remind the congregation that discipleship is not confined to worship but lived out in homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities.

Preaching Notes

The Christian life is not meant to be admired from a distance—it is meant to be lived. James speaks with unmistakable clarity: hearing the word without doing it leaves faith incomplete. Scripture that remains unpracticed becomes like a mirror glanced at and quickly forgotten. Discipleship reaches maturity when belief becomes action, and conviction takes root in daily habits.

James 1:22–27

In **James 1:22–27**, faith is measured not by knowledge, but by transformation. James points to practical expressions of lived faith: care for the vulnerable, restraint of speech, and integrity of life. True religion, he says, shows up where compassion meets action and devotion shapes behavior. Faith that does not move outward into love and service becomes hollow, disconnected from the life God intends.

Throughout this series, we have explored three essential movements of faith: following Jesus, loving people, and sharing grace. These are not separate tasks to be completed in sequence; they are interwoven practices that shape a life rooted in Christ. To follow Jesus is to adopt his way of life. To love people is to reflect God’s character. To share grace is to participate in God’s ongoing work of healing and renewal. Living the way of Jesus means allowing all three to shape how we move through the world.

Matthew 28:18–20

In **Matthew 28:18–20**, Jesus’ final words make clear that discipleship is both personal and communal. The risen Christ sends his followers not as individuals acting alone, but as a community shaped by his teaching and sustained by his presence. The Great Commission is not merely about going somewhere else; it is about living differently wherever we are. Jesus does not promise ease or certainty, but he does promise presence: “I am with you always.” Discipleship is sustained not by our strength, but by Christ’s ongoing companionship.

Micah 6:8

The prophet **Micah** offers a concise and enduring summary of faithful living: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. These practices ground lofty theology in everyday faithfulness. Justice names our responsibility to address what is broken. Kindness shapes how we treat one another. Humility reminds us that we walk with God, not ahead of God. Together, these practices describe a life aligned with God’s heart.

Living the way of Jesus is not about achieving moral perfection or mastering spiritual techniques. It is about faithful practice—returning again and again to the way of Christ when we stumble, grow weary, or lose focus. This final week invites the congregation to ask not simply *what do we believe*, but *how will we live?*

How will we live the way of Jesus together?

What habits will we cultivate?

What ministries will we strengthen?

What relationships will we nurture?

The goal is not perfection, but faithfulness—trusting that God will continue to work through us as we practice what we believe.

For Wesleyans, discipleship is always lived faith. John Wesley insisted that Christianity is not a religion of ideas alone, but a way of life shaped by holy habits and loving action. Grace, once received, draws us into practices that form us over time.

Wesley spoke often of **the means of grace**—intentional practices such as prayer, Scripture, worship, accountability, acts of mercy, and acts of justice. These are not burdens placed upon believers, but gifts that help us live the way of Jesus faithfully. Through these practices, sanctifying grace continues its work, shaping our desires, actions, and relationships.

Living the way of Jesus is not something we accomplish on our own. Wesley emphasized community as essential to growth in grace. We walk together, encourage one another, correct one another in love, and trust that God uses shared faithfulness to transform both individuals and communities.

As Wesleyans, we believe that grace forms us so that our lives may reflect Christ in tangible ways. Living the way of Jesus means trusting that God meets us in practice—shaping us as we follow, love, and share grace day by day.

Liturgical Resources

Call to Worship (Option 1)

Leader: God has shown us the way of life.

People: To follow Jesus, love people, and share grace.

Leader: We are called not only to hear God's word,

People: But to live it with courage and faith.

All: Come, let us worship and commit ourselves to God's way. Amen.

Call to Worship (Option 2)

Leader: Go and make disciples, says the Lord.

People: We are sent to live our faith in the world.

Leader: Christ goes with us wherever we go.

People: Empowered by grace, we step forward together.

All: Let us worship the God who sends us. Amen.

Call to Worship (Option 3)

Leader: What does the Lord require of us?

People: To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Leader: This is the life we are called to live.

All: Come, let us worship and prepare to put our faith into practice. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Faithful God,

You have called us, loved us, and filled us with grace. Gather us now and strengthen us to live the faith we profess. Shape our hearts, guide our steps, and send us out ready to serve, love, and walk humbly with you. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon

Gracious God,

We confess that it is often easier to talk about faith than to live it. Forgive us when fear, comfort, or distraction keep us from acting on what we believe. Renew our commitment to your way, and give us courage to follow through with faithful lives of love and grace. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: God is faithful and just, full of mercy and grace. In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and we are empowered to live as God's people. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of all goodness,

Receive these gifts as signs of our desire to live out your mission. Use what we offer—our resources, our time, and our lives—to bring hope, healing, and grace to the world. Shape us into people who practice what we believe. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs

Hymns (United Methodist Hymnal)

- **Here I Am, Lord** (UMH 593)
- **Take My Life, and Let It Be** (UMH 399)
- **Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore** (UMH 344)

Worship Songs

- Build My Life
 - I Will Follow
 - The Commission
-

Benediction

Go now to live the way of Jesus. Follow Christ with faith, love others with compassion, and share God's grace in all you do. May the Spirit guide you, the Son walk beside you, and the Father send you into the world. Amen.
