

CALVARY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
131 WEST SECOND STREET, FREDERICK, MARYLAND 21701

the people we are
BECOMING

MidWinter Worship Series
10:00 A.M. Worship

www.Calvaryumc.org

The People We Are Becoming

A Midwinter Journey into Love, Service, Courage & Commitment

As we enter a new year, many of us are still holding the Star Words we proclaimed during Epiphany, simple words meant not as resolutions to fulfill, but as companions to embody on the journey. These words invite us to pay attention: to where God might already be shaping our hearts, our habits, and our hopes.

They lead us to a deeper question, one that sits at the heart of this study:

What does it mean to become?

Becoming is not a single decision or moment. It is a process of formation, often slow, sometimes challenging, always shaped by relationships. We are becoming something as individuals, yes, but we are also becoming something together as a community of faith.

The United Methodist Church names this shared calling in its newest 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."*

This vision flows from the Church's enduring mission:

"To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

Taken together, these statements remind us that discipleship is not simply about what we believe, but about who we are being formed to become, and how that formation takes shape in the world.

This study invites participants to reflect on identity, discipleship, and vocation as followers of Jesus in the Wesleyan tradition.

Together, we will explore how Scripture, history, and lived faith shape who we are, and who God is calling us to become, both as individuals and as a congregation.

As a church, the question of becoming touches every part of our shared life. It includes our journey as a Reconciling Congregation and our commitment to loving boldly and welcoming fully. But it also reaches beyond that.

We ask:

Who are we becoming to the partners in ministry we support and walk alongside?

Who are we becoming to our neighbors here in Frederick?

How are we known in our community, as people of compassion, joy, courage, and hope?

Rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, we believe faith is formed through **practice** as much as **profession**. John Wesley taught that discipleship is lived out through **holy love, joyful service, and courageous witness**, a faith shaped in community and expressed in the world.

Throughout this study, we will listen deeply, reflect honestly, and imagine faithfully. We will consider how God is forming us, personally and collectively, to live into this calling in the days ahead.

This is not a study about having all the answers. It is an invitation to walk together, trusting that God is at work in the becoming, for the sake of the world God loves.

Blessings to you all as we journey together.

~Dr. Hutton

WEEK 1 - Rooted & Ready

Theme: Identity, heritage, courage

Primary Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:3–14

Secondary Scripture: Joshua 1:1–9

Courage, in Scripture, rarely begins with confidence. It almost always begins with remembrance.

In 2 Timothy 1, Paul does not start by urging Timothy to be bold or fearless. Instead, he reminds him of his story. Timothy's faith did not originate in a moment of heroic decision; it was shaped over time, received through the faith of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Before Timothy ever chose faith for himself, faith had already chosen him.

This matters, because Scripture consistently teaches that identity is received before it is lived. Timothy is not being asked to invent a new version of himself for a difficult moment. He is being called to remember who he already is, and whose faith he carries forward.

Paul then names what Timothy is likely feeling: fear. Yet fear is not condemned or denied. Instead, Paul reframes it. Courage, here, is not an absence of fear but the presence of trust. "God did not give us a spirit of fear," Paul writes, "but of power and love and self-discipline." These are not personality traits; they are practices shaped by relationship with God and sustained in community.

Courage, in this letter, is not dramatic action. It is faithfulness over time, choosing to remain rooted in love, grounded in discipline, and open to God's power, even when the future feels uncertain.

That same pattern appears in Joshua 1. Joshua stands at a threshold moment. Moses is gone. Leadership has changed. The people are unsettled. God does not reassure Joshua by outlining a detailed plan. Instead, God offers a

promise of presence: "I will be with you wherever you go." Joshua is commanded to be strong and courageous not because he is prepared, but because he is not alone.

In both texts, courage emerges most clearly at moments of transition. It is required not when the path ahead is obvious, but when faithfulness means stepping forward without certainty.

This understanding of courage sits at the heart of the Methodist tradition. John Wesley believed that discipleship is not built on isolated acts of bravery, but on formation within community. Faith is guarded, not by tightening our grip on ideas, but by entrusting the gospel to God and to one another. The "good treasure" Paul urges Timothy to guard is not simply doctrine, but a way of life shaped by love, sustained by grace, and lived out together.

Wesley taught that grace goes before us, forms us within community, and continues to shape us over time. Identity precedes mission. We do not act courageously to become God's people; we act courageously because we already belong to God.

As we begin this series, we are invited to pause and remember.

- What faith has been entrusted to us?
- What stories shape who we are?

And, how might remembering our roots give us the courage to step into what comes next?

We begin this journey not by rushing ahead, but by grounding ourselves, rooted in grace, and ready to follow where God leads.

Opening (10 minutes)

Opening prayer

Check-in: *"When you hear the word 'Methodist,' what words, memories, or experiences come to mind?"*

Scripture Engagement (20 minutes)

Read **2 Timothy 1:3–14** aloud (invite 2–3 voices).

Key Focus Points:

- Faith passed on ("from your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice")
- God's spirit is **not fear**, but **power, love, and self-discipline**
- "Guard the good treasure entrusted to you"

Discussion Questions (25 minutes)

What does this passage suggest about how faith is formed over time?

Where do you see courage connected to identity rather than action?

What "good treasure" has been entrusted to our congregation?

How does knowing our story help us face the future with confidence?

Wesleyan Connection (10 minutes)

Reflection question: *How does our Methodist story shape the people we are becoming today?*

Closing Practice

Silent prayer: "God, root me where I need grounding; ready me where I need courage."

WEEK 2 - Love Boldly

Theme: Radical love, belonging, reconciliation

Primary Scripture: John 13:31–35; 14:1–7

Secondary Scripture: Galatians 3:23–29

Bold love, in the Gospel of John, does not begin with welcome slogans or good intentions. It begins with vulnerability.

When Jesus speaks the words, *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another,"* the setting matters. Judas has just left the room. Betrayal is already in motion. The cross is no longer a distant possibility, it is imminent. And, it is here, in the shadow of loss and fear, that Jesus defines what love will mean for his followers.

This is not sentimental love. It is covenantal love, love that remains when things fall apart.

Jesus does not say, "Love one another if it is easy," or "Love those who are like you." He roots the command in his own self-giving: *"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* The measure of Christian love is not comfort or agreement, but Christ himself.

Immediately after this command, Jesus speaks words meant to steady anxious hearts: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled... In my Father's house there are many dwelling places."* These are words of belonging. Before the disciples understand what is coming, Jesus assures them that there is room, room in God's household, room in God's future, room in God's love.

Belonging, in John's Gospel, is not something earned. It is something promised.

The apostle Paul echoes this truth in Galatians 3, where he names the radical implications of life in Christ: *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."* This is not a denial of difference, but a declaration that difference is no longer a barrier to belonging.

Paul is clear: **identity in Christ reshapes every other identity.** Baptism becomes the great equalizer, not because it erases who we

are, but because it anchors us in a deeper truth. We belong to Christ, and therefore, we belong to one another.

This kind of bold love is not passive. It is disruptive. It challenges boundaries that have long been treated as fixed. It confronts systems that sort, exclude, and divide. And, **it calls the church to live as a community where reconciliation is not an abstract ideal, but a practiced way of life.**

For the Wesleyan tradition, love has always been the center of holiness. John Wesley insisted *that there is no holiness without love of neighbor, and no love of God that does not move outward toward others.* Love, for Wesley, was not merely personal affection, it was social, embodied, and transformative.

To love boldly, then, is not simply to feel warmly toward others. It is to commit ourselves to lives of hospitality, accountability, and repair. It is to tell the truth about harm, to listen across differences especially when we ourselves, are not named, and to trust that the Spirit is still forming the church into a more faithful witness.

As a congregation on a Reconciling journey, these texts ask us honest questions:

- What does it mean to create space where people are not merely welcomed, but truly known and affirmed, just as they are?
- Where are we being called to move beyond tolerance toward genuine belonging?
- How might Christ's love reshape not only who is included, but how we live together?

Bold love is not easy. But, it is how the world recognizes the presence of Christ.

And so, in this chapter of our shared story, we are invited to practice love that risks, love that remains, and love that makes room, trusting that, in Christ, there is always space enough.

Opening (10 minutes)

Opening prayer

Check-in: *Where have you experienced Christ-like love in the church? Where has love been harder?*

Scripture Engagement (20 minutes)

Read **John 13:31–35; 14:1–7**.

Key Focus Points:

- Love as Jesus' *command*, not suggestion
- Love as the defining mark of discipleship
- "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places"

Discussion Questions (25 minutes)

How is Jesus' definition of love different from cultural ideas of love?

Why do you think love is both simple and difficult?

What does it mean for a church to *love boldly* rather than cautiously?

How does this passage speak to inclusion, welcome, and belonging?

Congregational Reflection (10 minutes)

Reflect on your journey as a Reconciling Congregation.

Question: *Where is God stretching us to love more boldly, individually and together?*

Closing Practice

Group prayer naming people or communities who need bold love.

WEEK 3 - Serve Joyfully

Theme: Gifts, purpose, joyful service

Primary Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7–11

Secondary Scripture: Matthew 25:31–46

In 1 Peter 4, the community is living under pressure. The future is uncertain. Yet the letter does not call the church to withdraw or protect itself. Instead, it invites believers to live attentively and generously: *"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."*

Service, here, is not framed as obligation or sacrifice alone. It is stewardship. The gifts we carry, whether visible or quiet, celebrated or unnoticed, are expressions of God's grace already at work among us. To serve is not to earn God's favor, but to participate in what God is already doing.

Joy emerges not from exhausting ourselves, but from aligning our lives with grace.

This vision of service becomes sharper in Matthew 25, where Jesus tells the story of the sheep and the goats. The surprise in this passage is not who is welcomed into the kingdom, but how unaware they are of their own faithfulness. *"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry... or a stranger... or in prison?"* they ask.

They served without knowing they were serving Christ.

Jesus reveals a truth that unsettles and liberates. Christ not found in grand gestures, but in ordinary acts of compassion. Feeding. Visiting. Welcoming. Showing up. Service is not spectacular, it is relational.

In this way, joy is discovered not through recognition, but through presence.

For the Wesleyan tradition, service has always been inseparable from discipleship. John

Wesley believed that **grace takes flesh in acts of mercy and compassion**. Faith, for Wesley, was never meant to remain abstract. It was to be lived out in care for the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, and the forgotten.

Yet Wesley also warned against service that becomes joyless or self-driven. True Christian service flows from a heart shaped by grace, sustained by community, and attentive to God's Spirit. It is not about doing everything, but about doing what we are called to do, together.

This week invites us to reflect not only on what we do, but, how we do it.

Do our acts of service flow from gratitude or guilt? From joy or exhaustion? From love or obligation?

As a congregation, these questions shape how we engage our mission partners and our wider community. Joyful service is not about solving every problem, but about showing up faithfully, listening well, and honoring the dignity of those we serve. It is about becoming a church known not just for what it gives, but for **how** it gives, with humility, consistency, and joy.

To serve joyfully, then, is to trust that God's grace is sufficient. That our gifts are enough. That even the smallest acts, offered in love, become holy. In serving one another, and our neighbors, we discover that joy is not something we manufacture.

Joy is something we receive, again, as we participate in the grace of God already at work in the world.

Opening (10 minutes)

Opening prayer

Check-in: *When have you felt joy while serving others?*

Scripture Engagement (20 minutes)

Read **1 Peter 4:7–11**.

Key Focus Points:

- Every person has gifts
- Service as stewardship of grace
- God is glorified through shared ministry

Discussion Questions (25 minutes)

What does this passage say about why we serve?

How is joy different from obligation or guilt?

What gifts do you see present in this group or congregation?

Where do you sense God inviting you to serve joyfully right now?

Practical Application (10 minutes)

Identify one act of joyful service participants could practice this month.

Encourage connections to local Frederick ministries like...

Closing Practice

Prayer of gratitude for gifts named aloud.

WEEK 4 - Lead Courageously

Theme: Justice, hope, public witness

Primary Scripture: Micah 6:1–8

Secondary Scripture: Luke 4:16–30

Courageous leadership in Scripture is rarely about position or authority. More often, it is about **faithful presence**, speaking truth, acting justly, and trusting God when the cost is real.

In Micah 6, God brings a case against the people, not to condemn them, but to call them back to relationship. God rehearses the story of faithfulness: liberation from Egypt, protection in the wilderness, guidance through uncertainty. Before God asks anything of the people, God reminds them of what has already been done on their behalf.

Then comes the question that echoes across generations: *"What does the Lord require of you?"* The answer is deceptively simple: *Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God.* This is not a checklist. It is a way of life.

Justice, in Micah, is not abstract fairness; it is concrete action that restores right relationship. Kindness, often translated as steadfast love, is not weakness, but covenant loyalty. And humility is not passivity, but attentiveness: walking closely enough with God to be shaped by God's purposes rather than our own.

Courage emerges not from certainty, but from faithfulness to this call. That same courage is on full display in Luke 4, when Jesus returns to his hometown synagogue. He reads from Isaiah, words of liberation, healing, and good news for the poor, and then declares, *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* At first, the crowd is amazed. But amazement quickly turns to resistance when Jesus names the wideness of God's mercy.

Courageous truth-telling often meets opposition. Jesus' leadership is not about popularity. It is about faithfulness to God's vision of justice and restoration, even when that vision unsettles those closest to him. The very people who know him best are the ones who struggle most with what he is becoming.

For the Wesleyan tradition, courageous leadership has never been about control or dominance. John Wesley believed that leadership in the church exists for the sake of love, love of God and love of neighbor. He insisted that personal holiness and social holiness belong together. There is no faithful discipleship that ignores injustice, and no justice-seeking that is not grounded in humility and grace.

Wesley's own ministry often placed him at odds with both church and society. He preached in fields when pulpits were closed to him. He spoke against slavery when it was economically and politically costly. His courage was not rooted in certainty of outcome, but in trust that God's grace was still at work in the world.

This week invites us to reconsider what it means to lead courageously as followers of Jesus. Leadership, in this sense, is not limited to titles or roles. It belongs to anyone willing to live their faith publicly, honestly, and compassionately.

We are invited to ask:

Where is God calling us to speak truth, even when it is uncomfortable?

How do we pursue justice while remaining grounded in humility?

What does courageous faith look like in our community, our relationships, and our witness?

As a congregation, this courage takes shape in how we show up for our neighbors, how we advocate for dignity and belonging, and how we remain rooted in hope even when change is hard. Courageous leadership does not promise ease or applause, but it does promise presence: God walking with us, shaping us, and sending us forward.

To lead courageously, then, is to trust that God's call is larger than our fear, that God's grace is stronger than resistance, and that

faithful witness, grounded in justice, kindness, and humility, can still change the world.

Opening (10 minutes)

Opening prayer

Check-in: *What words come to mind when you hear "courageous faith"?*

Scripture Engagement (20 minutes)

Read **Micah 6:1–8**.

Key Focus Points:

- God's concern for justice and faithfulness
- Faith as lived integrity
- Humility paired with courage

Discussion Questions (25 minutes)

Why do justice and humility belong together?

Where do you see courage required in following Jesus today?

How does faith move from private belief to public witness?

What injustices do you feel called to pray about or address?

Wesleyan Lens (10 minutes)

John Wesley believed there is *no holiness but social holiness*.

Reflection: *How does courageous faith show up in community life?*

Closing Practice

Pray for courage to live faithfully in complex times.

WEEK 5 - Love That Lasts

Theme: Covenant love, commitment, Lent

Primary Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Secondary Scripture: Ephesians 3:14–21

Love, in Scripture, is not fleeting feeling. It is the power that sustains faith when everything else gives way.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes not to celebrate romance or idealize affection, but to address a fractured community. Spiritual gifts are being ranked. Voices are competing. Faith has become performative. And, into this tension, Paul speaks a truth that still unsettles us: **without love, even the most impressive acts of faith are empty.** This is not love as emotion. It is love as commitment.

Paul's description of love is practical, embodied, and enduring. *Love is patient. Love is kind. Love bears, believes, hopes, and endures.* These are not qualities that emerge in moments of ease; they are forged over time, through practice, forgiveness, and perseverance. Love lasts not because it is effortless, but because it is rooted in God.

That grounding becomes clearer in Ephesians 3, where Paul offers a prayer rather than instruction. He asks that believers may be strengthened in their inner being, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... so that you may have the power to comprehend... the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ." This is love that exceeds understanding, love that holds us even when we cannot hold everything together.

Covenant love, Scripture teaches, is not something we generate on our own. It is something we receive, and return.

For the Wesleyan tradition, love has always been the measure of holiness. John Wesley believed that Christian perfection was not flawlessness, but perfect love, a heart so shaped by grace that love becomes its

defining orientation. This love is not abstract. It is lived out in daily choices, sustained through community, and refined through discipline.

As we stand at the threshold of Lent, these texts invite us to reflect on how love shapes our becoming. Lent is not a season of self-improvement, but of honest attention, a time to notice what strengthens love and what diminishes it. It is an invitation to let go of whatever distracts us from loving God and neighbor fully.

On this Valentine's week, when culture celebrates love as attraction or romance, Scripture offers a deeper vision: love as faithfulness, love as endurance, love as shared commitment. Love that shows up when it is inconvenient. Love that remains when answers are incomplete. Love that grows not through intensity, but through trust.

This final week asks us to gather everything we have explored together:

- identity rooted in grace
- love practiced boldly
- service offered joyfully
- leadership exercised courageously

And to hold it all within the steady promise of God's love.

As individuals and as a congregation, we are invited to ask:

What kind of love will shape us in the season ahead?

What practices will help us love more faithfully?

Who is God calling us to love more deeply?

To love that lasts is to trust that God's love is already at work within us, forming us, sustaining us, and sending us forward. As we prepare to enter Lent, we do so not empty-handed, but held by a love strong enough to carry us through whatever comes next.

This is the love that makes us who we are.

And, it is the love that continues to shape the people we are becoming.

Opening (10 minutes)

Opening prayer

Check-in: *What makes love lasting rather than temporary?*

Scripture Engagement (20 minutes)

Read **1 Corinthians 13** in multiple voices.

Key Focus Points:

- Love as action and endurance
- Love rooted in God, not emotion alone
- Love that shapes how we live together

Discussion Questions (25 minutes)

Which description of love challenges you most?

How does God's love sustain us through change?

How does this series help us imagine who we are becoming?

What might God be inviting you to practice this Lent?

Series Reflection (10 minutes)

Invite participants to name one word or phrase that captures their takeaway.

Optional: write a personal Lenten intention.

Closing Practice

Prayer of commitment for the season ahead.

Prayer of Commitment & Commissioning

Faithful and forming God,

You have met us in this season of becoming,
rooted us in grace,
taught us to love boldly,
called us to serve joyfully,
and invited us to lead courageously.

We give you thanks for the work you have already begun with us.
For the stories that shape us,
for the gifts that sustain us,
and for the love that holds us when the way forward is not clear.

As we step into the days ahead,
we offer ourselves again to your forming grace.
Shape our hearts to love as Christ loves.
Guide our hands to serve with joy and humility.
Strengthen our spirits to live our faith with courage and hope.

Where we are tempted to fear, grant us trust.
Where we are tempted to withdraw, send us outward.
Where we are tempted to rush ahead, teach us to walk humbly with you.

Make us faithful neighbors in our community,
honest partners in ministry,
and a church known by love that welcomes, heals, and restores.

As we prepare to enter the season of Lent,
help us release what weighs us down
and take up practices that draw us closer to you.
Let this season deepen our compassion,
clarify our calling,
and renew our commitment to follow Jesus more fully.

Send us now, O God,
not with all the answers,
but with hearts open to your Spirit,
ready to be shaped,
ready to be sent,
ready to become the people you are calling us to be.

We offer ourselves to you,
for the sake of the world you so love.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
who goes before us and walks with us always.

Amen.

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As you engage these weekly studies, we invite you to join us in worship Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. as we explore these themes more deeply together.

Worship is where these reflections come alive, where prayer, music, scripture, and community help us embody what we are studying.

Gathering each week allows us not only to learn about love, service, courage, and commitment, but also to practice them as the people God is shaping us to become.

Through shared worship, we are formed together, rooted in our tradition, attentive to the Holy Spirit, and sent forth to live out our faith in tangible ways.

Weekly Themes

January 18 — Rooted & Ready Who we are as Wesleyan people: where our story begins, how God grounds us, and how we step forward with courage.

January 25 — Love Boldly Bold love as Christ's command and our calling, including our journey toward being a Reconciling Congregation.

February 1 — Serve Joyfully Discovering our gifts, embracing joyful service, and living compassion in our Frederick community.

February 8 — Lead Courageously Courage in action—justice, hope, reconciliation, and public witness as modern disciples.

February 15 — Love That Lasts A Valentine's reflection on God's steadfast love and a gentle introduction to the journey of Lent.