

***Shiloh United Methodist Church***  
Faith by Method

Ephesians 2:8-10

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Ephesians 2:8-10 CEB

<sup>8</sup> You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. <sup>9</sup> It's not something you did that you can be proud of. <sup>10</sup> Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

Since we gathered last I have taken on a new role. It is a role that brings me more anxiety and nervousness than getting up in front of you all each Sunday. I am not prepared for this role besides that I have from time to time taken part in this activity. Currently I am volunteering as my youngest daughter's, 6 and 7 year old, indoor soccer coach.

Last week was our first practice and I took time beforehand to read the coaching guide, and prepare a practice plan. The league is located in a church, so as a part of the practice we do a short prayer and devotional in the middle of practice and that was prepared too.

Now you have all seen me Sundays, I can do ok with children's time and I volunteered at our vacation bible school this summer. I do ok with kids. Let me share with you a humbling moment. Not 10 minutes into practice I have kids all together and we are doing a drill and I look up to notice 3 boys are just not with us. They are on the other side of the court, one swinging on the goal, the other is kicking his ball into the other teams practice(coaches who I will say were so prepared they had masking tape to write kids names on their backs), and by the time I got them back in the group it was time for devotional. I have never been so unable to translate scripture to any audience in my life...I think I

equated faith with brushing your teeth and it all headed downhill from there.

We made it through the practice with only one kid getting poked in the eye and me being just slightly befuddled. As we were driving home my youngest says, “Dad you are a great coach! Practice was so fun!”

I thought to myself, “That is not what I just experienced, I thought that was a mess.” Also, just last Friday they had to move some kids around and one kid had so fun that her mom called to get their daughter back on my team.

In our culture the most critical judge of our character is generally ourselves, and the society follows closely behind. Telling us we are not enough, that our life and our work are a mess, and even that we somehow do not belong.

Let me share a story with you of a man named John. We will be hearing stories about John throughout our series. John is someone who people might consider a failure if they only studied the first part of his life. The first part of his life involved him quitting a fancy fellowship at a prestigious school to go back and help out his father, a father who had spent his childhood in jail from time to time was ailing. After his father died he set off for a distant land after he had successfully helped people get out of unjust situation. In the new land he tried to be successful sharing a message of hope with a foreign people and also those who traveled with him, but he wound up in love. Obsessed with his career he missed his chance at his true love, and instead wound up with a warrant for his arrest. As he stole away on transport back to his homeland he encountered a people who taught him to listen deeply to God in his life.

This man who was in spiritual crisis by the middle of his life was John Wesley, the founder of our faith. His life would be considered a masterpiece by many inside and outside the Methodist tradition and he

offers us many methods we can use to help our lives be shaped by God today.

However, his life was anything but perfect. John never had a successful marriage or family.

John Wesley is a reminder to us that God can use all kinds of people to help share God's grace with the world, even us who seem to not have our whole lives together.

In the movie *Mona Lisa Smiles* there is a scene about painting famous artists by numbers. In it the main character describes how it is strange how in their lifetimes many artists are not appreciated for the brilliance they bring. And yet after we see the brushstrokes of their lives we seem obsessed with pulling apart their methods to see if their brilliance can rub off, so we might be able to paint and create like they did.

Let's watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5SZ5UcmROY&t=107s>

The other character I want us to learn about today is John's mom. Susanna Wesley is the reason John would go on to share a method of faith that we can learn from today. Susanna was married to Samuel Wesley and bore him 19 children. She had a lot of knowledge for a woman of her day. She knew Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

Susanna also stood up and made sure she did what was right in a day in which that would have been seen as incorrect and insubordinate as a spouse. When Samuel Wesley, John's dad (he got in debt; bishop bailed him out and told him to go to another church but he didn't), was in prison they had an awful sub preacher. Susanna held church in her home Sunday afternoons and it was more well attended. The sub preacher complained to Samuel, to which Samuel wrote to Susanna to request she stop holding church. Susanna responded, "If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to

do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

One story about John Wesley is that one day their house caught on fire. All, except John, got out of the house. You could hear John crying out from the nursery window. Samuel, his father gave up on John quickly, but the village people did not. They stood a man on another’s shoulders and got to the window to pull John from the burning house, just before the roof collapsed. Susanna, his mother, would say following this event, “Is this boy not a brand plucked from the burning.”

John would grow by his mothers instruction in languages, and teaching and grew wise because of her constant method for growing. Including time where each child sat with their mother to talk about their spiritual direction, what God was doing in their lives? Susanna was a pastor at heart and all those around her knew this. With her guidance John would learn that the method of becoming part of God’s masterpiece is being an outward sign of the inward Grace we feel from our God.

We are all here in this church, because we got a spiritual nudge at some point. We gather because we trust that this nudge is God, saying as author Erqin McManus says, “What is your idea of you? Who is it that you have decided to become? If your greatest work of art is the life you live, and ultimately life is a creative act, what life will you choose to leave behind as your masterpiece?”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/courage-and-conviction-a-womans-leadership-through-a-difficult-time>

<sup>2</sup> Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art*

Friends the truth is the nudge we get from God is a reminder that an inward sign of Grace is reminding us we are created for God's purpose in our lives. The method we choose to express that helps us draw the masterpiece that God hopes for our lives. And from Wesley we need to know and we will learn over these next weeks that these moments of being a masterpiece will happen at different ages of our lives. Wesley did not find his calling until the middle of his life.

By God's grace I may find out I am an ok soccer coach, you may find out God is using you to transform someone else.

I leave you with this: Last week I was here at the church and Toby Stapleton, one of our trustees, was here. He showed me this beautiful work of art. Toby has always had an knack for drawing as an architect. However, he has chosen to take classes with Mike Casper a local artist. This beautiful image is something he has discovered at a new stage in his life, the brushstrokes reveal how God is still at work through him.

Remember God's brush strokes of grace through us vary from real brushes, to hammers and nail building, to caring for others, and the list goes on.

How are you letting God make you a masterpiece? Let's explore ways these next two months that John Wesley offered us a method, a faith by numbers, so we might explore God's grace filled art being fulfilled in the lives we live.

Amen