
Graphics and Audio Notes

- There **will** be a sermon starter video.
- There **will** be notes and / or scripture to show on screen during the sermon.



Key Questions

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about life together in relationship with other people.

Why is this sermon important?

It is important because having the right people surrounding you can have a profound impact on your life.

What is the context of this sermon?

This is the first week of the worship series focused on group life. The graphics, video and some sermon content have been adapted from the TWO Gather series at Life.Church - online at <http://bit.ly/2d0jDo0>.

What are the next action steps?

Consider joining one of three new Wesley Small Groups launching at First UMC El Dorado before Easter 2017.

What is the good news? What is the bottom line?

The good news is that when two or two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, God is there with them. Jesus presence is real.

What are other key takeaways?

For social media

- Living life together is part of who we are as United Methodists. Methodism started as a movement to inspire and train disciples for Christian living and to spread scriptural holiness across the land. In 1729, a few young college men gathered at Oxford and started the first small group in Methodism. These class meetings or Wesley Small Groups were the start of a movement which spread from England to the United States and would emerge into congregations and eventually a denomination.
- We are making plans to launch three new Wesley Small Groups before Easter 2017 so that we can more effectively live our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

- A Wesley Small Group is a group of 8 to 12 people who commit to do life together centered around our discipleship pathway.
 - A Wesley Small Group exists to be a catalyst for the spiritual development of its members along our discipleship pathway. The goal of the group is to discover where each person is in her or his relationship with God and where God is calling her or him to grow in faith and love. The focus is not to gain more information; it is to be a vehicle for enabling people to actually live as disciples of Jesus Christ as they worship, grow, give, serve and share.
 - A Wesley Small Group will:
 - 1) Create community at the depth necessary to experience and grow in God's grace through fellowship, worship and prayer.
 - 2) Offer accountability for a responsible Christian life through sharing, guidance, correction and study.
 - 3) Care deeply by bearing one another's burdens, watching over one another in love and reaching out in concern and service to the world.
 - The members of a Wesley Small Group meet weekly for 60 to 90 minutes to study and share life, encouragement, guidance, care, and accountability. Outside their weekly meetings, they gather several times during the year for fellowship and fun, to serve beyond the walls of the church, and share their faith with others.
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Metadata

Topics

- Grow

Sermon Books of the Bible

- 1 Corinthians
- Daniel
- Ecclesiastes
- Genesis
- Matthew

Tags

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, ElDorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference, GreatPlainsAnnualConference, smallgroup, grouplife, WesleySmallGroup, discipleship, grow

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Good News

Call to Action

Our History of Life Together

Wesley Small Group Launch Plans

What is a Wesley Small Group?

Why do they exist?

How will they succeed?

What do they do?

Transition

Invitation

I'm sorry. Thank you. Please.

Not ready to pray

Ready to pray

Logistics

Closing

Closing Prayer

Daniel 3:19-30, CEB

¹⁹Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and his face twisted beyond recognition because of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In response he commanded that the furnace be heated to seven times its normal heat. ²⁰He told some of the strongest men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of flaming fire. ²¹So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound, still dressed in all their clothes, and thrown into the furnace of flaming fire. (²²Now the king's command had been rash, and the furnace was heated to such an extreme that the fire's flame killed the very men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to it.) ²³So these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell, bound, into the furnace of flaming fire.

²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in shock and said to his associates, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?"

They answered the king, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

²⁵He replied, "Look! I see four men, unbound, walking around inside the fire, and they aren't hurt! And the fourth one looks like one of the gods." ²⁶Nebuchadnezzar went near the opening of the furnace of flaming fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. ²⁷The chief administrators, ministers, governors, and the king's associates crowded around to look at them. The fire hadn't done anything to them: their hair wasn't singed; their garments looked the same as before; they didn't even smell like fire!

²⁸Nebuchadnezzar declared: "May the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be praised! He sent his messenger to rescue his servants who trusted him. They ignored the king's order, sacrificing their bodies, because they wouldn't serve or worship any god but their God. ²⁹I now issue a decree to every people, nation, and language: whoever speaks disrespectfully about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's God will be torn limb from limb and their house made a trash heap, because there is no other god who can rescue like this."

³⁰Then the king made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prosperous in the province of Babylon.

Response to Scripture

One: The word of God for the people of God.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Introduction

Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

Listen for God's Word

I invite you to listen for God's word today.

Place for Notes

You can find a place in your bulletin to take notes or, if you prefer, in the event for this worship service in the Bible app on your mobile device

Tool for Spiritual Growth

When you learn something new, have a question, make a connection with your life or hear anything that will help you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ as you worship, grow, give, serve and share, write it down.

Then, use these notes as a tool to help you grow in your faith in the days ahead.

Prayer

Will you pray with me?

O God, use these words to speak good news, so that, as individuals and as a congregation, we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you, and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Life is Better Together

Series Review

Today, we begin a new series - TWO Gather. Each week, we are going look at stories in the bible of people who share their life together and what these mean for our life today.

We will find a common theme each week in the words of Jesus from Matthew 18:20.

Key Scripture: Matthew 18:20

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."¹

Wherever two or three gather together, wherever two or three come together in Jesus' name, God is there in the midst of them.

Now, you may say, "Does that mean God's not there if I'm by myself?" Of course not, God will never abandon you.² But Scripture talks over and over and over again about the power of God that is with us as we gather in community with other believers. There's something powerful about Christians who come together in community.

Life is better together.

¹ Matthew 18:20, CEB.

² Deuteronomy 31:6, CEB.

God's Work through Relationships

Throughout the Bible, we find that God uses God's people to bring about God's purposes, and there is power in relationships. This is consistent from the beginning to the end of the Bible.

Key Scripture: Genesis 2:18

At the beginning of the Bible, when God is making all things and Adam is all by himself, we read these words in Genesis 2:18:

"Then the LORD God said, "It's not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him."³

It's not good that this guy is alone. So, God created Eve.

Key Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

When we look at the book of Ecclesiastes, we read this in chapter 4:

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their hard work. If either should fall, one can pick up the other. But how miserable are those who fall and don't have a companion to help them up!"⁴

Key Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:33

And the opposite is true as well. Not only can the right people propel you in the right direction, but the wrong people can take you in the wrong direction. Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:33:

"Don't be deceived, bad company corrupts good character."⁵

Top Five Relationships

In fact, what I want you to do for a moment is think about the five most dominant voices in your life.

Think about your five closest friends for a moment.

Who are those you spend the most time with?

If you want to see the potential in your life, look at the five most dominant relationships around you. If you take a close look at the five most dominant voices in your life you can get a clue to the trajectory of your life.

Example: Relationships at Work

Let's say you work and your closest five buddies work with you. And they all hate their job, hate the company, hate the boss, they don't like this, nothing's fair, can't get ahead. Guess what? You've got a ceiling on your professional career because you've got a bad attitude and you're not going anywhere.

³ Genesis 2:18, CEB.

⁴ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, CEB.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:33, CEB.

On the other hand, if the five people you work with say, Hey, I believe we can be promoted here – if we serve our company as if we were serving the Lord and we honor our boss. Those folks can get a promotion.

Example: Relationship with God

You take your relationship with God. All of your friends, they are casual Christians. They call themselves Christians but don't live like it, or they may not be Christians at all. You hang around with people like that they will pull you down.

You hang around people who make living as a disciple of Jesus Christ a priority, they pray and read the Bible, they are using their gifts to make a difference.

Guess what?

You are becoming more like Christ because of those around you.

You show me the five most dominant voices in your life and I will show you where your life is heading.

So, What?

So, why does this matter? Because when people gather together for the right reasons, God is there and is at work in the life of each person. Where two or more gather together in Jesus' name, there he is among them. God is there and lives are changed.

Transition

This brings us to the story from scripture for today. Let me give you the context, as told by the Deep Blue Bible Storybook.

Courageous Friends

Key Scripture from Bible Storybook

"I want everyone in my kingdom to worship me," said the king. "I'm the most important person in the land."

So the king made a new rule. "Anytime the music plays, said the king, "everyone must stop what they're doing and kneel down to the gold statue. Whoever does not worship the statue will be thrown into a very hot fire."

Three of the king's helpers were young men who believed in God. They knew that if they worshipped the gold statue, they would be obeying the king, but disobeying God. They decided that they would obey God. When the music played, they did not kneel and worship the statue.

The king found out that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not worship the gold statue. "If you kneel down and worship the statue the next time the music plays, you'll be safe," said the king. "If you don't, I'll throw you into a very hot fire."

"We won't worship a statue," said the three young men. "We only worship God."

"Make the fire even hotter!" yelled the king. He was very angry. "Then throw these three men into the fire!"

And so Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the very hot fire. The king watched to see what would happen. He was surprised to see the men walking around in the fire. They were not hurt.

Then the king started counting, "One, two, three, four." Four? Why were there four men? "Didn't we put three men in the fire?" asked the king. "Now there are four!"

What a surprise! An angel was in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

"Let the men out," said the king.

The three young men came out of the fire. They were not hurt at all. They didn't even smell like fire.

"Look, their God took care of them," said the king. "Praise God!"⁶

Lessons from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

This story teaches us something about when it is important to have the right people in your life.

People that are with you heart and soul, no matter what happens.

I'm not talking about, "I'm your Facebook friend." "I follow you on Instagram."

One curated image at a time, let's do life together.

No, I'm talking about people who are in your life all of the time, heart and soul, every bit of it. People that you can count on to help you stay on the discipleship pathway and rely on you to do the same for them.

When you have to decide whether to obey God or not

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had the right people in their life.

When they had to decide whether to obey God or not, they had the right people in their life that helped them obey God and not the king.

When you are in the fire...

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had the right people in their life.

When they were literally thrown into the fire, they were there with their friends. They didn't face the difficult parts of life alone. They had each other's back.

When you are in the fire, God shows up.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had the right people in their life.

When they were with each other in the fire, God showed up.

God.

Showed.

Up.

This is what happens when you have the right people in your life.

⁶ Kerry Blackwood, Daphna Flegal, and Brittany Sy; with special thanks to Elizabeth F. Caldwell, *Deep Blue: Bible Storybook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 200-203

Personal Reflection: The Right People in Your Life

Now, I want you to be really honest for a moment and ask yourself, “Do I have the right people in my life?”

Is there a group of people that you meet with regularly that hold you accountable to a faithful life?

Do you have people in your life that really know what’s going on with you? When they ask, “How’s it going?” They can hear you say, “Doing good.” and they say, “No, really, how are you?”

Are there people that are able to call you out when you are deciding to do something other than follow God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength?

Lack of Spiritual Leadership

When I consider these questions for myself, right now, the answer is no.

There have been times in my life when I have been part of a Wesley Small Group - meeting with people on a weekly basis who are focused on moving forward on the path of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and helping each other on the way.

But, I’m not right now.

I confess my lack of spiritual leadership by not being part of a small group to help me grow in my faith and to model for you what it is like.

Transition

That is going to change for me, I need a group like this in my life.

I need to be surrounded by the right people and I invite you to join me.

Conclusion

Good News

The good news is that when two or two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, God is there with them. Jesus presence is real.

Call to Action

Our History of Life Together

You see, living life together is part of who we are as United Methodists.

Methodism started as a movement to inspire and train disciples for Christian living and to spread scriptural holiness across the land.⁷ In 1729,⁸ a few young college men gathered at Oxford and started the first small group in Methodism. These class meetings or Wesley Small Groups were the start of a movement which spread from

⁷ <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/vital-congregations-our-legacy>

⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "John Wesley," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Wesley&oldid=740356800 (accessed September 23, 2016).

England to the United States and would emerge into congregations and eventually a denomination.⁹

Wesley Small Group Launch Plans

We are making plans to launch three new Wesley Small Groups before Easter 2017 so that we can more effectively live our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

So, what will these groups look like?

What is a Wesley Small Group?

A Wesley Small Group is a group of 8 to 12 people who commit to do life together centered around our discipleship pathway.

Why do they exist?

A Wesley Small Group exists to be a catalyst for the spiritual development of its members along our discipleship pathway. The goal of the group is to discover where each person is in her or his relationship with God and where God is calling her or him to grow in faith and love. The focus is not to gain more information; it is to be a vehicle for enabling people to actually live as disciples of Jesus Christ as they worship, grow, give, serve and share.

How will they succeed?

A Wesley Small Group will:

- **Create community** at the depth necessary to experience and grow in God's grace through fellowship, worship and prayer.
- **Offer accountability** for a responsible Christian life through sharing, guidance, correction and study.
- **Care deeply** by bearing one another's burdens, watching over one another in love and reaching out in concern and service to the world.

What do they do?

The members of a Wesley Small Group meet weekly for 60 to 90 minutes to study and share life, encouragement, guidance, care, and accountability. Outside their weekly meetings, they gather several times during the year for fellowship and fun, to serve beyond the walls of the church, and share their faith with others.

Transition

If you want to be part of a group like this, come talk to me after worship, send me an email or give me a call this week.

I need relationships like this in my life.

I wonder if you need relationships like this too.

Invitation

Some of you may say, "I'm not even sure that I have a relationship with God."

⁹ <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/vital-small-groups-fueled-a-movement>

But, maybe, I'd like to. I've heard about God's love, no matter what, and it sounds good. I know there are places in my life where I've messed up and need to be forgive. I want to follow Jesus, clear away the mess in my life and start fresh.

You can.
All you have to do is ask.

I'm sorry. Thank you. Please.

It's a very simple thing to pray – I am sorry. Thank you. Please.
I'm sorry for all the things in my life I know are wrong.
Thank you Jesus for your life, death and resurrection for me. I put my faith in you.
Please, come fill me with your Spirit and help me live for you every day.

This is the start of a relationship with God.

Not ready to pray

You may not be sure if you want to pray a prayer like that and that's okay.
You don't have to.

Ready to pray

If you do,
it may be the very first time in your life, or
perhaps the first time in a long time, or
maybe you have prayed like this every day for a long time.

Logistics

You do not have to pray it out loud, but just quietly under your breath.
You can repeat after me.
I'm sorry, thank you, please.

Closing

Life is better together.
It begins with a relationship with God.
Will you pray with me?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, I am sorry for all the times in my life when I mess up.

And if anything comes to mind, ask God's forgiveness.

Forgive me of my sin and all that I know is wrong.
Thank you that you died on the cross and rose for me.
I trust you with my life.
Help me receive your forgiveness.
Please fill me with your Spirit and help me to follow you.
In your holy name, Amen.