



October 2023

Theme: Reclaim. Revive. Renew.

Scripture Passage: Psalm 51:10-12

Short Meditation

Prayers have always been of great importance for us United Methodists. John Wesley, the founder of our movement, described prayer as one of the most powerful ways to develop a personal connection with God. John's brother, Charles Wesley, believed that corporate prayer fosters a sense of unity among believers and reinforces our shared faith.

Together in Prayer is a call to reconnect with the essence of who we are as disciples of Christ and United Methodists. It is an invitation to unite our hearts and seek a stronger connection with God and one another. To go deeper in our relationship with Jesus Christ and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministries.

Reclaim. Revive. Renew. During my first meeting with the council of bishops of the United Methodist Church, the president of the council, Bishop Tom Bickerton, shared this focus as a vision of hope for our journey forward as United Methodists as we move past an extended season of disagreements, divisions, and disaffiliations. This focus is a solid foundation for the transformation God is inviting us into. This vision is one that I support and will engage fully in the years to come.

And, as we engage in it, there are a few things I feel we need to be clear about.

First, let's be clear that this project of reclaiming, reviving, and renewing us is not ours but God's. It is not us but God who is reclaiming us and reclaiming those that we, the church, have forsaken in our communities. Also, as we embrace this as a season of reclaiming, we must resist the temptation to reclaim backward when God calls us to move forward.

Second, given the ongoing turmoil in the world, disorientation, more than a season, is our new normal that we must embrace as our missional field, not try to run away from it. We cannot pray for revival hoping that disorientation ends; we need to ask God for revival amid the disorientation so that we can overcome our fears and move forward courageously, claiming our distinctive identity as disciples and United Methodists, trusting God is with us, and boldly engage a hurting world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, there is the prayer for renewal.

When meditating on God's promise of renewal, I was drawn to Psalm 51, verses 10 through 12. This is not your traditional Psalm of renewal. This Psalm relates to a story that confronts our fragility and human brokenness. David's prayer, more than a prayer of renewal, is one of confession, repentance, and surrender. Through this prayer, David cried to God for mercy when confronted with his wrongdoings. David humbly acknowledged his sins to God and implored God for forgiveness and restoration.

I believe that Confession, Repentance and Surrender is the most faithful response to God's desire to reclaim, revive, and renew the church.

Renewal will come to our lives, ministries, and the United Methodist Church as the fruit of our individual and collective confession for the ways we have fallen short of our calling to be light and salt in the world. Renewal will come when and only if our mindset, strategies, and plans embody clear and concrete acts of repentance that seek to close the gap between our previous intentions and our actions and that lead to more faithful ways of being the church in the world.

Renewal will come, and it is only a viable and sustainable proposition if we are willing and ready to surrender our agendas so that a renewed vision FROM GOD unfolds for the witness and ministry of United Methodists worldwide.

Our challenges are not new. Church decline in the US is not new. COVID-19 did not cause our decline; it just put it on display, accelerated, and amplified it. The declining spiritual effervesce in some parts of our connection is not new. The pervasive manifestation of systemic racism, sexism, privilege, and exclusion is not new in the United Methodist Church.

So, as we begin this journey. As God is reclaiming. As God is reviving. As God seeks to renew us – what is it for us to do? Psalm 51 suggests that we must confess, repent, and surrender as a church, leaders, and followers of Jesus.

We must confess how we have allowed the world, the circumstances around us, and our desperate attempts at survival to weaken our identity as United Methodists – people called to love God and our neighbors as Christ loves. We must confess that for decades, here in the US, we have been relationally disconnected from our communities. Most of our local congregations do not reflect the people in their communities as we have turned inward. And, we must confess that while the world is hurting and plagued with the re-emergence of racial hate, white supremacy, gun violence, toxic politics, war, and climate change, and when there is an entire generation seeking hope and purpose, we have been, for the most part, silent, nowhere to be seen, distracted by our internal debates and inability to hold our differences and disagreements in Christian love, which has left us fractured, weakened, and divided.

United Methodists, we are on a journey of renewal. As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed – it is already happening. God is doing something new.

During your times of prayer this month, I invite you to open the eyes of your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to help you imagine what your life, your church, and our communities will look like if we embrace God's invitation to surrender to the Holy Spirit so that we can once more be claimed, revived, and renewed by the healing grace of Jesus Christ.

Write down what you see. Share it with others in your church, your pastor, and me.

God is doing something new. God is reclaiming us for God's purposes. God is reviving and deepening our faith. God is renewing us to be who God needs us to be TODAY for the world. May our response to God's invitation be to confess, repent, and surrender, and like David, in humility, lift our broken hearts to God and pray.

Prayer for the Month

Create a clean heart for us, God. Put a new, faithful spirit deep inside us! Please don't throw us out of your presence or take your holy spirit from us. Return the joy of your salvation to us and sustain us with a willing heart – Amen.

Prayer Queues or Breath Prayers for the Month

- Oct 1 – God of grace, create a clean heart for me (us).
- Oct 8 – God of mercy, put a new, faithful spirit inside me (us).
- Oct 15 – God, in your mercy, don't give up on me (us).
- Oct 22 – God, in your faithfulness, return the joy of your salvation to my (our) soul(s).
- Oct 29 – God, through the Holy Spirit, sustain me(us) with a willing heart.

